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Frederick Douglass Transcribe-A-Thon Preserves Black History

February 8, 2022

BLOOMINGTON, Ill. — An opportunity to transcribe and conserve historic documents while connecting with Black history will be available at Illinois Wesleyan University on Feb. 14.

Wesleyan will host a Frederick Douglass Day Transcribe-A-Thon event on Monday, Feb. 14 from 11 a.m. to 2 p.m. in Ames Library Room 105b or via Zoom.

Collaboratively hosted by the Illinois Wesleyan [Writing Center Tutoring Services](#) (WCTS) and the [Office of Diversity and Inclusion](#) (ODI), the event is open to the public.

Participants will transcribe documents from state and national conventions of Black activists in the 19th century. Those attending the event in person will work in groups to transcribe documents in order to gain a more accurate representation of the author's original message. Attendees are encouraged to bring laptops or tablets for transcribing, but can also share screens. Birthday cake and cupcakes will be provided to celebrate the birth of Douglass. Virtual attendees will work individually on transcribing documents. The event can be attended virtually by clicking [this link](#) and using the passcode 077646.

Douglass Day celebrates the birth of Frederick Douglass where people gather to create and preserve resources about Black history. The date, Feb. 14, is historically significant because it represents both the chosen birthday of Douglass and, according to [the program's website](#), was one of the original inspirations for Black History Month.

"I think the Transcribe-A-Thon event is an outstanding opportunity to connect with our country's history in a really personal way. By participating in the Transcribe-A-Thon, you're getting a first-hand account of someone else's words and ideas. Who knows how those words might resonate with you today?" said Sharla Brown-Ajayi, director of ODI. "In addition, you're doing your small part to make sure these documents are available for future generations. I also love the community aspect of the event, whether you join in person or online. We're all working towards the same goal."

This year's event is a collaboration with the [Colored Conventions Project](#) focusing on the work of Douglass's contemporaries with a specific focus on Black female activists.

"There have been, for many years, a variety of women featured during Douglass Day but looking specifically at Black women activists adds another layer in a time of continued unrest at home and outside of the United States of America," said Anna Scanlon, director of WCTS. "We need, now more than ever, to be inspired and to see how change can happen on every level. Hopefully reading their work will empower another generation of activists."

Brown-Ajayi said this event also serves as a good reminder of how influential Black women have been in the pursuit of equality.

"Throughout the writing of our country's history, the contributions of African-American women have been conveniently left out. We're no longer leaving out these remarkable, brilliant people. It's important to make sure their stories are included to tell our full history," said Brown-Ajayi.

For questions about the IWU Transcribe-A-Thon event, email Anna Scanlon at ascanlon@iwu.edu. For more information and history about Douglass Day, see the [program website](#).



After escaping from slavery, Frederick Douglass became a national leader of the abolitionist movement. He is remembered as a prominent activist, author and public speaker.