

Frederick Douglass Statue Erected in the U.S Capitol

Written by Shayla Mulzac
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It is the 101st statue erected in the Capitol Visitors Center, but only the fourth in honor of an African-American. While each state has only two such famous figures in the hall, this is the first opportunity for D.C. to welcome one of its very own. Congressional Republicans have refused to allow a second, declining to give the federal District of Columbia equality with states.

“Douglass’ life as an active D.C. resident and his deep commitment to our equal rights are the reasons that his statue is here to be unveiled today as a gift from the almost 650,000 American citizens of the District of Columbia,” Congresswoman Eleanor Holmes Norton said in prepared remarks at the unveiling.

Placement of the statue marks the culmination of the decade-long argument between DC leaders and Congressional Republicans over whether DC should be allowed to have the statue since it is not a state, but a federal district.

“Frederick Douglass stood even taller when he lent his stature as a world leader to his home town and refused to temper his demand for congressional voting rights and local self-government for the residents of the District of Columbia.”

The unveiling was organized and led by House Speaker John Boehner and in attendance were the descendants of Frederick Douglass, members of Congress, local leaders and Vice President Joe Biden.

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Like Norton, Biden also used the tribute to the 19th century abolitionist, author and statesman as an opportunity to push the issue of equal voting rights for the people living in the nation's capital. Though he didn't mention "statehood" per se, the vice president addressed Douglass' work advocating equal justice and stated that Douglass supported voting rights for his fellow residents of DC.

He said he and President Obama both support "home rule, budget autonomy and a vote for the District of Columbia."

Emancipation Hall is also home to statues honoring Dr. Martin Luther King Jr., Rosa Parks (the reputed "Mother of the Civil Rights Movement") and abolitionist Sojourner Truth.

The Douglass statue stands 7 feet tall and weighs nearly 1,700 pounds of pure bronze. The statue shows Douglass grasping a paper in one hand, his other resting upon a lectern complete with quill and ink.