

Letter from the Minister

July, 2026

When I was a Junior in high school, my history teacher caught me passing a note to another student during one of his lectures. (The note was a hand-drawn colorful map with directions to the *Tastee Treat* in a nearby town.) Looking back, I recall long bouts of boredom in high school history classes, partly because the teacher never spoke about the role of girls or women of the past.

Today, as July rolls around and Independence Day looms, if I were to paint the way my spirit feels, it would be a canvas filled with swirls of not sky-blue paint but purple-like-a-bruise blue. Our country is marking its 250th anniversary this week. Although I am grateful, I don't feeling much like celebrating.

Podcasts, books, documentaries, and movies about the Declaration of Independence, are being promoted right now, highlighting especially the contributions of the founding fathers such as Unitarians Thomas Jefferson and John Adams. To say the least, the times were frightening for a group of colonists in a new-to-them country. "Brave men" are the words often associated with these authors and editors of the document that created our democracy. And yet, I feel a wee bit ambivalent. I mean, most of us are aware of some shortcomings of Jefferson and Adams who wrote "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal..." and yet, the two owned slaves.

In a recently televised interview with Harvard professor Danielle Allen, when asked about whether we Americans should be proud of the group of flawed men who created and signed the important document, the professor answered with an affirmative, "Yes, we

should be proud.” However, Allen continued, “Pride doesn’t mean you can’t be clear-eyed about shortcomings.”

Aside from excluding Africans and Indigenous in the famous clause, there was and is, yet another “shortcoming.” For example, women were also left out. And with each retelling of our history, women have endured a persistent “slight” or “total disregard” for their role.

Consider this, no one talks about Abigail Adams, wife of John, who had written a letter to her husband dated March 31, 1776, asking him to "remember the ladies" when creating new laws for the United States. It was during this time that Abigail *alone* buried a still-born daughter while John was away, but no one speaks of Abigail’s sacrifices or that of other women during the birth of our nation. Neither the “slaves” nor the “ladies” were included in the document that advocates for freedom for all.

Of course there are other instances when women are considered an afterthought. For example, there are a few children’s books about Harriet Tubman, but there is not one day set aside as a national holiday to recognize her bravery or to honor that of *any* woman in history, for that matter.

And even when we ponder contributions of other courageous men such as Frederick Douglass, the abolitionist, social reformer and prominent advocate of African American civil rights who rose to notoriety in the 19th century, the traditional story asserts that “Frederick Douglass taught himself to read.” When I heard this *again* in a recent recitation, I questioned the statement.

No less impressed with his achievements, I wanted to know who taught Douglass the letters of the alphabet and their sounds? Any

teacher knows that learning the letters and the sounds of each one is a perquisite skill for learning to read. Someone had to have taught the alphabet to Douglas.

I did a little research. There in Wikipedia was one small sentence about how the slave owner's wife, Sophia Auld, taught the alphabet to Frederick Douglas when he was around 12 years old. Of course, her husband, Hugh Auld, found out and put a stop to it because "Knowledge unfits a child to be a slave." It is indeed no less impressive the acclaim to which Douglas rose, but it was a woman who first taught him the letters of the alphabet.

This year, when the fireworks light up the night sky, I will be seated on a blanket eating bread and butter pickles just as I did as a child. (You see, on the 4th of July, my family served homemade bread and butter pickles with the main meal. Not because it was any kind of sacred tradition in my home but because, what else can you do with bushels of cucumbers newly ripe from a Midwest garden this time of year?)

So I will eat the green produce, each slice floating in a jar of vinegar and sugar. I will cherish both the sweet and the sour flavors. It seems a fitting activity as I pause to reflect on the missing stories of people who so passionately lived and died in years past, striving to create our nation and for all who, today, provide sweet respite and welcome in our country. And yet, I will also sit with the sour reality of great and present suffering of countless people living in hardship and fear in our country. My prayer for our nation is one of gratitude and yet, great concern.

With you on this journey of hope. – *Rev. Amy Kindred*