

Kota Rinaldi-Second Place
Senior, Mount Everett

The peaceful coating of the Berkshires today covers the dark tragedies that once took place here. The story of Elizabeth Freeman is one of struggle, determination, and great success. She had a goal in mind, worked towards it, and ultimately succeeded in making significant change in her life and many others. This success may not seem like a major event when observing through a modern lens, but when you realize that it occurred during a time when white men had near complete control over everybody else in the United States, this was an unprecedented achievement.

The Emancipation Proclamation, which was intended to free all enslaved people in the US, was issued on January 1, 1863. However, Elizabeth Freeman's suing for freedom occurred in 1781, which was over 80 years earlier. This fact alone shows the sheer courage and determination that she possessed at the time. There was a period of massive societal change between those two times to reach the point where enough people supported abolishing slavery to get it to happen. And, at a period before this progress was made, Freeman had the courage needed to fight back against her oppressors by using the law against them. After finding another enslaved person by the name of Brom to support her in her cause, the court case Brom and Bett v. Ashley occurred and ruled in favor of the former in only one day. After gaining her freedom, Mum Bett finally held control of her own life, and she represented that fact by changing her name to Elizabeth Freeman. One thing led to another following the spark that was Freeman's story, and the enslaved people trade in Massachusetts was abolished completely in 1788.

This historical moment is more than worth celebrating once you look at the progress in our society today that it has contributed towards. Without Elizabeth Freeman, it is quite possible that the abolition of slavery in the US would have been delayed. That bright spark caused pushback against oppression to grow, and it empowered the people fighting for abolition as a whole, making the necessary progress occur much quicker. And, without Elizabeth Freeman, we would lose a major source of inspiration and motivation for countless young people today that continue to fight for equality.