The North Star Newspaper: Frederick Douglass and Rochester

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Suggested Age Group: Elementary

Lessons/Themes: Abolition, Activism, Modern Activist Movements, Institutional Racism

Topic Overview:
This activity takes a new look at presenting historical information. Formatted as a newspaper, this activity displays the life, works, and legacy of Frederick Douglass. After an introduction to Douglass, the articles turn to modern activist movements.

For More Information, Please Reach out:
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FREDERICK DOUGLASS AND ROCHESTER
Past and present together
RIGHT IS OF NO TRUTH-SEX IS OF NO COLOR
GOD IS THE FATHER OF US ALL, AND ALL MEN
ARE BRETHREN

Who is Frederick Douglass?

By Jordyn Smith

Frederick Douglass was born in 1818 and died at the age of 77. Within that amount of time, he had the ability to complete a magnitude of different accomplishments, much of which some may find shocking given he had been an enslaved person up until 1838. Many years of both mental and physical abuse throughout his enslavement sparked the fuel to his fire and Douglass triumphed. Throughout his time, Douglass visited Ireland where he spent time focusing on human rights more than anything. He considered his time in Ireland to have been a transformative period and the happiest time of his life. Douglass also spent time working with Susan B. Anthony and the Women’s Suffrage.

He attended the Women’s Rights Convention held at Seneca Falls in 1848. At the convention, although Douglass was one of thirty two men who signed the Declaration of Sentiments, he was the only African American at the entire convention. Douglass is also commonly known for his first published piece, Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. This was the initial piece which led his transition from orator to writer.

Douglass produced many pieces of literature and speeches that really exemplified his purpose behind what he did as an abolitionist and fugitive slave and even more importantly expressed who he was as an individuals. His personality was clearly exhibited through his work, it was quite easy to see how humble yet heroic he was in a multitude of ways.
As we continue to share the history of Douglass in Rochester and how his legacy has impacted future generations, begin thinking of how all the dots connect, or for that matter don't. We will share stories of how racism is still prevalent to this day and as a young generation we hope to open your eyes to the subject in a new way, a way that allows you to be the change Douglass had worked so hard for.

Douglass Moves to Rochester

By Terrance Adderley

After Frederick Douglass became a free man, he moved to New Bedford, Massachusetts. On the search for a new place to live, Douglas arrived in Rochester, New York in 1843. For twenty years, Douglass called Rochester his home. While in Rochester, Douglass would have many guests who participated in the anti-slavery movement and would help in guiding the ex-slaves to his home.

Once arriving in Rochester, Douglass began to idealize his idea of creating his newspaper. Within his first three years in Rochester, Douglass met a woman named Amy Post.

Ms. Post was a local Rochester political activist who supported women's rights and worked towards abolishing slavery. In a conversation with Ms. Post, he explained his finalization and creation of newspaper articles. As his article developed, in 1847, Douglas created The North Star. The North Star was created in an effort to display his belief that African-Americans should have the ability to own their brands and businesses. Douglass also said that his newspaper article was created in an effort to condemn slavery and other racial groups.
After living in Rochester for a few years, Douglass wished for his children to receive a quality education. He believed that his children should attend school with white students. Douglass received backlash from both racial groups because he wanted his children to integrate with the other students. Douglass strongly believes that his children should be able to attend the white schools. African-Americans in the Rochester community thought the best way for their children to get a quality education was by homeschooling them, instead of attempting to enroll their children into white institutions. Douglass, on the other hand, did not agree with the rest of the community. Before long, Douglass began to embrace and speak on his faith in Rochester.

Douglass hoped to prove to Americans that African-Americans were in fact intelligent, despite the American contrary belief. In the mid-1800s, white Americans had the misconception that African-Americans were not intelligent, believing that they were unintelligent and idiotic. When delivering his speech, Douglass delivers a powerful quote that resonated with much of the audience, Douglass said, “This Fourth of July is yours, not mine. You may rejoice, I must mourn.” He wanted the audience to understand white Americans were celebrating their independence on July 4th, but for him being black and knowing that slavery was still exsistant at the time, independence and freedom was something he had no sense of.

In the year 1852, Douglass made a remarkable speech held at Corinthian Hall in Rochester called, What to the Slave is the fourth of July? This event dates back to July 5th. It was the 75th year of the Declaration of Independence. About six hundred people attended the delivery of his speech. In his speech, he explained the importance of slaves’ freedom and the abolition of slavery in the United States.
After suffering an unexpected house fire in 1871, Douglass moved to Washington, D.C. and continued to speak on African-Americans' rights and freedoms. Frederick Douglass died of a heart attack on February 20, 1895, at the age of 77. Following his death, his body was returned to Rochester in recognition of him as a black political activist and abolitionist. Years following his death, Rochester received a statue of Douglass in honor of him and the many other abolitionists who resided in Rochester.

Rochester Residents Acting Out: 3 Vandalized Frederick Douglass Statues in the Past Few Years

By Lauren Nawojski

Frederick Douglass has 13 statues in Rochester, New York as recognition for the work he had done as an abolitionist. Over the twenty years in which Douglass had lived in Rochester, he gave multiple speeches, published newspapers, and supported women's suffrage. Although several people are proud to support Douglass in this area, there have been others who’ve felt differently. Whether it was a drunken mistake, or just the disagreement on the Black Lives Matter Movement, in the past few years, people have acted out. Within those past few years, there have been three incidents where a Frederick Douglass statue has been vandalized.
The most well-known of the three incidents involved two St. John Fisher College student-athletes. After a night of drinking, Charles Milks and John Boedicker attempted to steal the statue of Douglass that is located at the intersection of Tracy and Alexander Streets. Because they were both heavily under the influence, it wasn't a challenge to catch them in the act. This action led to the two students being suspended by the college. The suspension was believed to have been the strongest form of punishment, along with law enforcement punishment, for the students at the time of their actions. After their arrest and appearance in court, the two boys were charged with criminal mischief. The two of them were accused of using racial slurs while committing the crime as stated by bystanders and witnesses. The boys continued to deny this, claiming that this was all a mistake caused by alcohol. Although this incident tampered with the college’s reputation, the school was willing to cooperate with authorities to take responsibility and action for the damage done by their students.

The second incident of the three was discovered on the 168th anniversary of one of Douglass’s most famous speeches, “What to the Slave is the Fourth of July?”. This statue was located at Maplewood Park and was removed from its base. This location held a lot of significance, in that it’s near Kelsey’s Landing. This is where Douglass, along with others including Harriet Tubman, led slaves to the Underground Railroad. The statue didn’t travel far from this area, as it was found against a fence less than 100 feet from it’s base. After hearing about this vandalism, previous Fisher student Milks came forward and offered his support in putting up a new statue in honor of Douglass. Milks claimed that he had since learned from the mistake he had made and was saddened to hear that a similar event had occurred. It was upsetting to hear that this incident had occurred on such a historic date for Douglass. This date was shared as a reminder of Douglass’s significance in his contribution towards ending slavery in America.

The third incident that had happened in the past few years involved the statue near East Main Street in Aqueduct Park.
A bystander had reported that the statue was removed from its base, and police began to investigate. Reasons as to why the statue was vandalized, who had vandalized it, and how it was vandalized were all unknown. The location of this particular statue holds significance because of Frederick Douglass’s history within this area. Aqueduct Park was near the location of where Douglass first published his papers, The North Star and the Frederick Douglass’ Paper. These papers were published in the Talman Building which is located on East Main Street. These articles were extremely significant, as they were published in support of the oppressed.

Although there is not complete evidence as to why these acts were committed, it seems as though there had to have been a similar motive behind them. Frederick Douglass is an iconic figure when it comes to abolitionists. Is it a coincidence that these statues were vandalized on significant dates in significant areas? Why were racial slurs thrown around while committing the act? With acts like this, they aren’t just done for no reason. There must’ve been a motive behind it, and amongst all involved, a very similar motive. Douglass was someone who worked to make a difference in a lot of worldwide issues, specifically racism. Today, racism is still a major issue and instead of staying quiet, people are speaking up. The Black Lives Matter Movement started in 2020 after George Floyd, a Black man, was murdered at the hands of the police. Not everyone followed in the movement, and they had no problem making it known. Since there holds such a divide on the outlook of racism in our society, it is no surprise that people would take extreme measures to prove their points. With the investigations not having much information, we may never know the true intentions behind these incidents, but with all sorts of context surrounding each situation, it leaves the community making different assumptions.

Protest in Minneapolis following the death of George Floyd
George Floyd & Daniel Prude
By Jordyn Smith

Daniel Prude and George Floyd, two black men who lost their lives to police brutality incidents. Floyd’s life was taken by Minneapolis Police Officer Derek Chauvin as he forcefully restrained Floyd for more than nine minutes. Prude’s life was taken by Rochester police officers as they pinned him to the ground, handcuffed and naked. A week later, he lost oxygen to his brain and passed away. Two similar situations and the one particular similarity, the black men and white police officers.

Daniel Prude’s brother had contacted the police as it had been reported that Prude was seen to be naked in the streets having broken windows while in the midst of a mental health crisis. Police responded and handcuffed Prude in addition to covering his head in a spit hood. While waiting for an ambulance to arrive, police used forceful constraint techniques. Prude’s autopsy revealed that he had PCP in his system, a hallucinogenic drug.

George Floyd was suspected to have used a counterfeit twenty dollar bill at a local convenience store. A suspicion we will never know the answer to because what was supposed to be a simple arrest turned into a life lost too soon.

Officer Derek Chauvin was convicted of murder and manslaughter where as the three officers involved in Prude’s case got away with their actions because medical examiners believed Prude’s death to have been caused by the PCP. Similar situations, yet different outcomes. How does one result with justice getting served, yet the other has no consequence?

When footage was released to the public of these two tragic events, a sudden call to action began throughout the nation. Scared, angered, and disappointed, citizens from all walks of life came together to protest and begin the Black Lives Matter movement. Although charges were placed on Chauvin, what about the systemic racism black people still face? These two events were a turning point in the never ending cycle of systemic racism that has continued long after Douglass’s time.