Chronicle Of Frederick Douglass Day In Chicago

May 15, 2009

Barry Rapoport
It is my hope that Dr. Reed’s book *All the World Is Here: The Black Presence at White City*, along with the Proclamation and the granite boulder become catalysts to spur education, art and knowledge.

Barry Rapoport, Program Organizer and MC

Dedication:

To Tina,
for her love and encouragement almost always.

Special thanks to my editorial team:
Cynthia Powell
Tina Rzepnicki
Carolyn McCrady
Gwendolyn Mitchell
Frances S. Vandervoort

To Erin and Andrew, Toulie and Rambeau

To my mother Ruth, in loving memory,
the source of the big heart in our family.

Photos: T. Rzepnicki
My name is Barry Rapoport and I am a retired public school teacher. In my thirty years of teaching, I have always sought to engage students on their level while at the same time providing them with tools that will prepare them for life in general. I love the teaching profession and especially enjoy investigative projects that not only peak the interest of students but give them a real-life objective. The events leading to the celebration of Frederick Douglass Day in Chicago as described in the following pages, began as a simple exploration into the life of Frederick Douglass, so that students could grow to appreciate the contributions of this icon in American history. I wanted the lesson to help students become responsible citizens capable of fully participating in our democratic society. Little did I know that the project would grow into a quest that spanned several years and garnered the participation of local politicians and community leaders.

I began the Frederick Douglass project in the spring of 2005. Like many other freshman English teachers in the Chicago Public School system, I required my students to read Douglass’ *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass: Written by the Slave Himself*. After reading the autobiography, students completed various follow-up assignments.
Some of these included original poems and songs, collages that represented Douglass’ life and principles, essays on Douglass as an inspiration, and pictionaries.

The best project, however, was yet to come. At a regional professional development meeting for teachers, I learned that in 1893, Frederick Douglass had been in the Chicago park located near the present day Hyde Park neighborhood. Also, he had made a speech at the World Columbian Exposition. Upon acquiring this information, I began the quest to locate the exact spot of the speech.

The first step involved finding a map to locate the site of the Haitian Pavilion constructed for the Exposition. The Pavilion was the place where Douglass delivered his speech. Fortunately, I did not have to go far. The Regenstein Library at the University of Chicago had a clear souvenir map that had been prepared for Raymond and Whitcomb’s Exposition tours back in 1893. To determine the site, I compared a current map of Jackson Park to the old souvenir map. I also had my students complete a variety of activities with the maps. Many of them were awed by the knowledge that Frederick Douglass had once stood on land so near their homes and school.

To expand the project into other course subjects, I sought the partnership of a math and a history teacher. Using the maps, we teachers went to the park and located landmarks that have not changed over the years. For example, the old steamboat pier at the entrance of 59th Street Harbor still exists. At the foot of the pier are limestone stairs, worn smooth by the thousands of visitors who came to the Fairgrounds on the steamboats from downtown Chicago. The northern end of Wooded Island, was a second landmark. Once we found what we were quite sure was the site of the Haitian Pavilion, the momentum of the project dramatically increased.
“The soul that is within me no man can degrade.”
Frederick Douglass
I envisioned my students learning and recapturing a bit of history on the very site where Douglass himself had once stood. The end of the spring semester of 2005, however, was rapidly approaching. I spent much of the summer getting the permission necessary to mount an educational project on Douglass in the park. I presented the idea to the Jackson Park Advisory Council (JPAC). The JPAC not only granted me permission but also offered wonderful suggestions to expand the scope of the project. Thus, the community became an integral partner. With letters of support from JPAC and Alderman Hairston, we received permission from the Chicago Park District to have students conduct mini-seminars for park visitors every Thursday after school from 3 to 5 pm. This portion of the project lasted from September 2005 until June 2006. Students were creative in their presentations; they used juggling, music, skits, oration, role playing, charts, and other tools. Park visitors responded to the students’ presentations positively and with appreciation.

In June 2006 when the project ended, we completed assessments of the students. Not only did we evaluate students academically, we noted the development of their social skills and character growth. Students informally evaluated themselves and each other. Many were proud of their ability to share their knowledge of Douglass with the public. The overall consensus was that students had indeed benefited from their participation.

We also completed a final report on the project. In the report we discussed the pros and cons of such an undertaking and listed them for future reference. The report also included three suggestions. The first was that a permanent marker be placed where Douglass made his speech in 1893. The second was that a sign be placed over Cornell Drive indicating it as the site of the 1893 World Columbian Exposition, and the third was that a sign with photographs of the first Ferris wheel in the world be placed near its former location.

“I am a friend to any people that have suffered the yoke of slavery.”
— Frederick Douglass
By the end of the year, it was clear to me that to even complete one suggestion mentioned in our report, we were going to need much more support. Thus, the idea of a giant, ten-foot puppet of Douglass was born. Using the puppet, I hoped to at least get enough attention to get the marker placed at the site of the Exposition. The quest to restore Douglass to his rightful place in Chicago history was by now a significant part of my life. I bent my life to the contours of the project and became P.A.L., Post Office Box 2986, Gary, Indiana 46403. The acronym P.A.L. referred to Partners at Learning.

Working with volunteers in Northwest Indiana, we planned and built the giant puppet. As I had hoped, the puppet became quite a welcome local attraction and an interesting vessel to relate the Frederick Douglass story. We began using it at art and reading festivals in Gary and Chesterton, Indiana. It was the main feature in a program at the Wildermuth Branch of the Gary Public Library. In the summer of 2007, we marched with the puppet for liberty and freedom in the Gary Independence Day Parade. A month later, crowds cheered the giant puppet in the Bud Billikin Day Parade as we displayed it with the Chicago Teacher’s Union floats. In the fall of 2008, the puppet represented solidarity and unity for teachers on the picket line at the Kennedy-King Elementary School in Gary, Indiana.

Finally after collecting many letters of support and petitions we were reviewed and approved by the Chicago Park District review committee and notified that we could begin to raise the funds needed and proceed with the project to place a marker. The big day for the dedication was set for May 15, 2009. Although it rained, this did not dampen the excitement I felt about our accomplishment. A photo of the unveiled marker can be seen on the inside-back cover of this Chronicle. Students, too, celebrated the significance of the event; they realized that they had made a positive impact on their community and city.

The rest of this Chronicle is a pictorial and narration of the dedication ceremony. The pictures show the presenters and the narration allows you to hear their words. This Chronicle is intended for the benefit and study of those interested in this event but were not able to attend or for those studying this event from a distant place or a future time. I hope that this Chronicle will provide a pleasant vicarious experience of this exciting day in the history of Chicago. This as I see it is a second chance to learn lessons missed in the past. We have an opportunity to learn them now and to pass them on to our children.
When generations disconnect we lose hard-won acquired knowledge. Can we afford to do that? How many of us become life-long knowledge seekers for the benefit of the common good? Frederick Douglass did. Can you? Can we? Do we have what it takes? Are we prepared to struggle to become our best selves?

July 4, 2007 Independence Day Parade in Gary, Indiana

“A little learning, indeed, may be a dangerous thing, but the want of learning is a calamity to any people.” Frederick Douglass

The poet-laureate Robert Hayden used this phrase to describe Frederick Douglass: ‘superb in love and logic’ of course it’s better to read the whole poem. How would you like to be described long after you have passed on?
Up to this point has been background to help you understand the process which led to the actual event. The dedication program began with the presentation of colors by the Honor Guard from the School of Leadership/South Shore Campus. I was very pleased that they did this since I had been both a student and a teacher there. It took three years from the time the school-park collaboration ended in the school to the time the boulder was dedicated.

Noon, May 15, 2009
In the footprint of the Haitian Pavilion
On July 4, 2007, two Mt. Carmel students were puppeteers in the Independence Day Parade in Gary, Indiana. Mt. Carmel High School well deserves its century long tradition for building character and leaders in academics and sports. Father Carl Markelz, principal of Mt. Carmel High School offered this moving invocation:

Frederick Douglass
Commemorative Marker Dedication

WE BOW OUR HEADS... ALMIGHTY CREATOR

THROUGHOUT OUR HISTORY YOU RAISE UP FOR US WOMEN AND MEN, OUR ANCESTORS, WHO DEDICATE THEIR LIVES TO JUSTICE FOR ALL PEOPLE AND WERE THE FORERUNNERS TO RECOGNIZING AND CALLING FOR LIFE, LIBERTY, AND GOD-GIVEN RIGHTS FOR ALL.

WE CELEBRATE FREDERICK AUGUSTUS WASHINGTON BAILEY WHO BECAME FREDERICK DOUGLASS, BORN A SLAVE, AND BECAME AN AMERICAN ABOLITIONIST, WOMEN’S SUFFRAGIST, EDITOR, ORATOR, AUTHOR, STATESPERSON AND REFORMER.
HIS EXAMPLE OF BELIEVING IN EQUALITY FOR ALL PEOPLE IS A WITNESS TO ALL WHO GATHER AT THIS HOLY GROUND TODAY.

BLESS THIS LAND WHERE THIS COMMEMORATIVE MARKER WILL STAND AS A REMINDER TO ALL OF HIS ENDLESS DESIRE TO BE ONE PEOPLE, ONE UNION.

AS HE WAS FOND OF SAYING, “I WOULD UNITE WITH ANYONE TO DO RIGHT, AND WITH NOBODY TO DO WRONG,”

MAY WE UNITE UNDER THE BANNER OF YOUR EVERLASTING LOVE AND CONTINUE HIS WORK OF BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER, FOR

“OUT OF IGNORANCE WILL COME A DESIRE FOR KNOWLEDGE.”

WE ASK THIS IN YOUR HOLY NAME.

AMEN!
Mr. William Tillis, Jackson Park Supervisor:

Good afternoon and welcome to the beautiful and historic Jackson Park on behalf of the general Superintendent of the Chicago Park District, Timothy Mitchell. The Chicago Park District is proud to be a part of this wonderful Dedication. Frederick Douglass’s dedication, courage and tenacity are important traits that the Chicago Park District works diligently to instill in our young people year after year.

Due to the efforts of our community partners today, the Frederick Douglass Commemorative marker will be an important symbol for residents and visitors to study for generations to come.

Directions to the reader: The bottom of this page is being left blank for you to come and find the boulder. You can sketch it in this space or write a poem or music or lyrics for a song. A freedom song. Then perform it for a group.
Alderman Leslie A. Hairston, 5th Ward:

First let me say good afternoon. It’s a great pleasure to be here on such a memorable occasion. It is a little more special for me today because I didn’t find out until my father’s funeral that I learned I was a descendant of Frederick Douglass. Unfortunately, this job has kept me so busy that I haven’t been able to trace the genealogy. My father and grandfather are both deceased now so I cannot ask them the questions. Ask questions of your parents and grandparents.

I would like to thank the Jackson Park Advisory Council (JPAC) and the Park District and everyone that is here today. More importantly those volunteers of JPAC who have worked so hard for so many years to protect, to maintain and to bring programming to our parks and now to see them moving in a different direction where we are honoring our parks. I think this marker is a testament to the work that they do. I also want to acknowledge the fine young men of the South Shore JROTC doing fantabulistic things in our communities.

I will now read this Resolution/Proclamation, signed by Mayor Daley, proclaiming today Frederick Douglass Day in Chicago.
A resolution
adopted by The City Council
of the City of Chicago, Illinois

Presented by ALDERMAN LESLIE A. HAIRSTON on APRIL 22, 2009

Whereas. Frederick Douglass lived and worked in Chicago in 1892 and 1893, and committed his life to working on behalf of freedom and equality for all people; and

WHEREAS, Frederick Douglass dedicated the first finished pavilion of Chicago’s World Columbian Exposition of 1893, the Haitian pavilion, and in his dedication speech celebrated the 89th anniversary of Haitian Independence Day; and

WHEREAS, Frederick Douglass broke out of slavery, helped many others do the same, crossed color lines and succeeded where others could not; and

WHEREAS, Frederick Douglass championed free education, fought for equal rights for women, fought against alcohol, fought to abolish slavery, fought for better jobs and for human rights; and

WHEREAS, Frederick Douglass served as Minister-In-Charge of the Haitian Pavilion throughout the entire 1893 World’s Columbian Exposition; and the historical record of this time period in his life is almost unknown, even by educated citizens; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED, That Friday, May 15, 2009, the 115th anniversary of the official opening of the World Columbian Exposition in Chicago’s Jackson Park, be proclaimed Frederick Douglass Day in Chicago by unanimous proclamation of the Chicago City Council.

[Signatures]

MAYOR

CITY CLERK
Frances S. Vandervoort, Vice President, Jackson Park Advisory Council:

TWO FREDERICKS

Yesterday, while looking through this small book, *Black Folk Wit, Wisdom, and Sayings*, I came across the following expression from Haiti: “If you want your eggs to hatch, sit on them yourself.”

About four years ago, Barry Rapoport, our organizer and prime motivator, discovered an “egg” and began to sit on it. That “egg,” that germ, inspired the event we are celebrating today. Thank you, Barry, and all others who have helped bring this event to fruition. I wish to thank, especially, 5th Ward Alderman Leslie Hairston, Ross Petersen, President of the Jackson Park Advisory Council, representatives of the Jackson Park administration, including Mr. William Tillis, and others too numerous to mention.

More than a century ago, here on the shores of Lake Michigan, two visionaries, each of whom was named Frederick, played a role in making possible today’s special event. The first was Frederick Law Olmsted, who with his partner Calvert Vaux, designed the entire South Park system -- Washington Park, the Midway, and Jackson Park.

Olmsted became the most successful designer of city parks in the nation’s history. In the 1850s he designed Central Park of New York City. After the Civil War, he designed parks in Boston, Niagara Falls, Washington, DC, California, and many more. When the Civil War broke out, he was hired by the Lincoln administration to be the Executive Secretary of the United States Sanitary Commission, precursor of the American Red Cross. In that role, he used his talents at handling large numbers of workers to build means of providing clean, dry living conditions
for the Union Army.

When Chicago was selected as the site for the World’s Columbian Exposition of 1893, Olmsted was hired to turn 630 acres of swampy, mosquito-infested land in Jackson Park into a site dry and safe enough to provide the footing for some of the largest structures ever built – right here, on this site – in this park, where today we celebrate the contributions of another visionary, Frederick Douglass.

Frederick Douglass was born a slave in Maryland in 1818, just 5 years before Frederick Olmsted was born to a wealthy family in Hartford, Connecticut. Frederick Olmsted went to Yale University, dropped out twice, sailed to China and back, set up a model farm in upstate New York, then traveled to the southern states to see for himself if slavery was a viable institution in America. He saw, of course, that it was not.

Frederick Douglass, after escaping from slavery when he was 20 years old, spoke often and eloquently about the plight of slaves. His powerful voice for freedom and his vision of democracy for all Americans pointed the way to voting rights legislation, to Brown vs. the Board of Education, and, ultimately, to President Barack Obama of the United States. Here, in 1893, on this very spot, Douglass spoke at the dedication of the Haitian Pavilion, the very first pavilion constructed for this great Fair. During the next 5 months, more than 27 million people passed through the gates of the Exposition, visiting the Haitian Pavilion and other venues representing the many nations of the world.

As a former teacher, I commend Barry Rapoport for emphasizing the EDUCATIONAL VALUE of this marker. Read the message on the plaque. As geologists like to say, every rock has a story to tell. This rock, a lovely granite boulder perhaps three billion years old, has on its surface the story of Frederick Douglass, who spoke for freedom for us all. Thank you.
Monica Vela, M.D. Assistant Professor, Vice Chair for Diversity, Department of Medicine, University of Chicago:

Dr. Vela could have been one of my students during the years I taught at Benito Juarez High School. I was a teacher there at the same time she was a student. She delivered this very concise, powerful and personal message. Listen and latch on to what you are about to hear.

Let me start by stating the three keys for success. Believe in yourself. Take advantage of every opportunity. Use the power of spoken and written language for yourself and your society. Frederick Douglass believed in himself. When he had the opportunity to speak on abolition he started by apologizing for his lack of education and then went on to give a great speech.

A long time ago I was an 11 year old daughter sitting on my father’s bed reading the Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass. I was so inspired by that book; I immediately read it again and again and again. My father came to this country with a 4th grade education. He was functionally illiterate. To this day his writing is a scrawl and he uses only capital letters. He went on to raise five children all of whom went on to get a college education.

Frederick Douglass lived as a slave, escaped, read everything he could. I stand before you as a Mexican-American woman of the 21st Century. You might say who is she to speak about Frederick Douglass? I believe that we are a product all of us of Frederick Douglass. I knew that if I worked hard, I could achieve my dream of becoming a doctor. These vital lessons from Douglass made me feel that I could do whatever I wanted with
my life and career choice and be successful. In this country opportunities to get a good education exist.

As to the legacy of Frederick Douglass he is in part responsible for us having an African-American President today.

To sum up, these are the lessons I learned from Frederick Douglass:

Believe in yourself. Take advantage of every opportunity. Use the power of spoken and written language for yourself and your society. And teach your children to do the same.

I want to thank Mr. Rapoport for reminding me of my memories of the voracious reader I was as a child. Thank you.

Barry: And I want to thank you, Dr. Vela, for being that voracious reader, working hard and achieving your dream; and, of course, for being here today to share the powerful influence Douglass had on you as you read his words again and again and again. Dr. Vela’s personal account demonstrates just how a writer and a reader can develop a meaningful and profound relationship through reading and writing and time.

Frederick Douglass quotes:

“Fugitive slaves were rare then, and as a fugitive slave lecturer, I had the advantage of being the first one out.”

“Man’s greatness consists in his ability to do and the proper application of his powers to things needed to be done.”

“It is easier to build strong children than to repair broken men.”

I believe that we are all of us a product of Frederick Douglass.” Monica Vela, M.D.
At the 1893 World Columbian Exposition Douglass listened to his grandson, Joseph Douglass, a professional violinist, perform. Frederick Douglass also played the violin and loved listening to music by Haydn and other classical composers.

John Tredon, a well-known violinist and violin teacher in the Hyde Park community has played violin for more than forty years. At this dedication he played his arrangements of Haydn’s Messiah and the Haitian National Anthem.

John is the Junior Strings Director of the Hyde Park Youth Symphony and a member of the Music Teachers of Hyde Park since its inception. He is an experienced violin teacher. You can contact him at 773-324-0726.

“People might not get all they work for in this world, but they must certainly work for all they get.” Frederick Douglass
Christopher Robert Reed, Author, *All the World Is Here: The Black Presence at White City*:

I am pleased to be here to speak today. I would like to make a few points pertaining to Douglass. He was not a citizen of Illinois. He was a citizen of New York. He visited Chicago in 1892 to dedicate the newly completed Auditorium Theater, a very impressive structure celebrating the 400th anniversary of the arrival of Columbus. Then he returned to dedicate the Haitian Pavilion in January of 1893. After that he went back to New York until he returned to host the Haitian Pavilion in May, 1893 through October. It was here in this pavilion that the African-American population could visit and feel that they had a home base where they knew they would be welcome. Let me stress that both white and black people came to see this great abolitionist. Douglass received the most dignified treatment wherever he went. He stood individually for the progress of an entire group. He opened doors of opportunity for many and his handshake made many feel a part of the Expo.

At the Haitian Pavilion you could sample the delicious coffees of Haiti. Douglass did not die a rich man; but he was a famous man. While he was here he also spoke at many churches in the city. He was welcome and recognized everywhere and received the finest treatment in the best restaurants. If you were with Douglass you also received the best treatment as Ida B. Wells remarked on her experience dining with him in a downtown oyster restaurant. If you want to know more, read my book *All The World Is Here: The Black Presence at White City*. Also, there is a book by Paula Giddings, *Ida: A Sword Among Lions*. Even though Ida was young and Douglass was old they talked, they collaborated, and they helped each other at this location at the World Columbian Exposition.
“We should not forget that the freedom you and I enjoy to–day…
is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons, of Haiti
ninety years ago…striking for their freedom, they struck for the
freedom of every black man in the world.”

Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Haiti" address delivered at the dedication of the Haitian Pavilion
Jean Martin is a fine Jamaican cook and opened the first Jamaican restaurant in Chicago. An international community activist, she stated that with the Haitian community, the Caribbean community, the Chicago communities and communities throughout the country, love for Frederick Douglass runs deep. And that this event today in turn reflects back to the Haitian founder of Chicago, Jean Baptiste DuSable. These heavy rains represent “Showers of Blessings!”

What a delightful metaphor for the rain!
Joy Bivins, Chicago History Museum curator:

When you are in Chicago visit both Jackson Park and the Chicago History Museum. It’s important for us to document our civic history and civic legacies and that Douglass is connected to the larger, national discussion in relation to the abolitionist movement and the civil rights movement.

For more information go to:
www.chicagohistorymuseum.org

Barry speaks: I want to thank everyone for leaping into this project and helping. For me Douglass has challenged us all to commit to work for the common good by turning toward fear courageously and with all the passion we can muster to be our best selves. How many of us truly make the commitment to being our best most useful self? Frederick Douglass did. Let us not forget that he was in Chicago.
Alderman Hairston unveils the boulder under SHOWERS OF BLESSINGS! Chicago is indeed ready to celebrate “Frederick Douglass Day in Chicago!”

In the foreground the man who seems to resemble Frederick Douglass is retired Fire Battalion Chief Mark O’Bannon. The Chief visited my South Shore classes recently and many years ago we both swam as teammates and brought back the city trophy for the TARS.
“I’ll work with anyone to do right and with no one to do wrong.”

— Frederick Douglass
Thank you for your interest in this project!

Barry Rapoport, Founder
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Barry teaches juggling and retells his favorite motivational story at assemblies, picnics, day camps, wherever people will gather to hear the story.

Barry also does seated Amma acupressure treatments at the Miller Beach Farmer’s Market in Gary, Indiana and is currently polishing his ancient Punch and Judy Show.
“We should not forget that the freedom you and I enjoy to-day... is largely due to the brave stand taken by the black sons, of Haiti ninety years ago... striking for their freedom, they struck for the freedom of every black man in the world.”

Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Haiti" address delivered at the dedication of the Haitian Pavilion

The Haitian Pavilion

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