

Rochester takes part in One Million Abolitionists project

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By Tianna Mañón

Kenneth Morris Jr. is well on his way to creating one million abolitionists. The [descendant of Frederick Douglass](https://rocdouglass.com/2018/03/27/douglass-descendant-wants-to-create-one-million-abolitionists/) (<https://rocdouglass.com/2018/03/27/douglass-descendant-wants-to-create-one-million-abolitionists/>) is in Rochester this week, and during an event Tuesday he gave away more than two dozen copies of his great-great-great-grandfather's first autobiography, "[Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass](http://www.libraryweb.org/~digitized/books/Life_of_Frederick_Douglass_an_American_Slave.pdf)." (http://www.libraryweb.org/~digitized/books/Life_of_Frederick_Douglass_an_American_Slave.pdf)

Morris, who is also a descendant of Booker T. Washington, is the co-founder and president of the [Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives](http://www.fdfi.org/) (<http://www.fdfi.org/>), an organization fighting human trafficking. One of Family Initiative's current projects is One Million Abolitionists, which aims to distribute a million copies of Douglass's "Narrative" to students — the new bicentennial edition features a re-designed cover and statements from Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives founders Morris, Nettie Washington Douglass, and Robert J. Benz along with several prominent Douglass scholars and enthusiasts.

Douglass "wrote it at the age of 27," said Morris. "He was only seven years removed from slavery, and he was a fugitive at the time."

Morris said after Douglass escaped from slavery, some Northerners had a hard time believing he was ever in bondage because he was "so eloquent" and dressed well. In the 1845 book, Douglass details his time in slavery and his escape. And it sold well, Morris says — more than 5,000 copies sold within months of publication, which was quite dangerous for a fugitive. But the book gave many people an inside look at slavery and this was instrumental in turning the tide in abolitionists' favor.

More than a century later, Morris now wants to use the book and his family legacy to educate and mobilize young people, especially against modern day slavery.

"Our purpose is to bring the guidance of history to the fight against modern forms of slavery," Morris said. "As part of the present-day abolitionist movement we strive to educate young people about all forms of forced servitude and human trafficking and inspire them to action."

Locally, about 2,500 will be handed out due to a partnership with Michelle Garcia-Daniels. She founded the Frederick Douglass Club and has been introducing local students to the historical icon for several years. She met Morris in 2009.

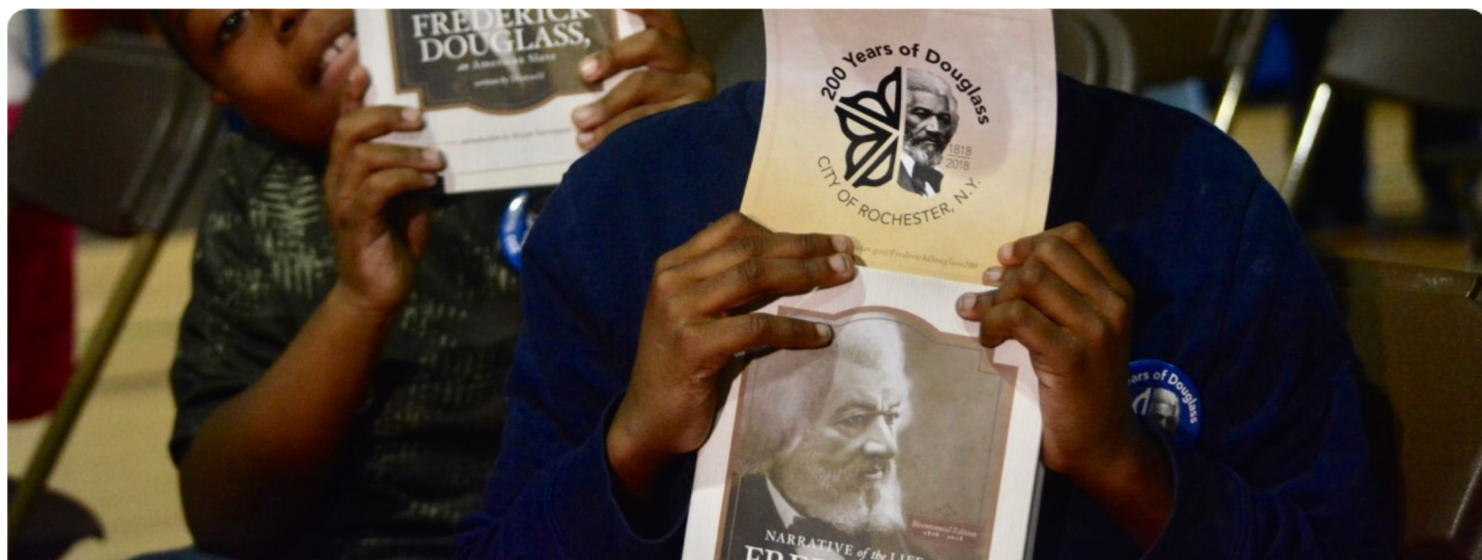
"I was so inspired," she said. "I took a lot of the information that he gave me and I brought it back to

school 12. One of the major things we did at School 12 was learn about Douglass and about how he learned how to read. Through reading, he gained freedom.”

School 12 and the Frederick Douglass R-Center, where Tuesday’s event took place, is on the South Avenue site where Douglass’s home stood (<https://rocdouglass.com/2018/02/13/douglasss-rochester/>) for 20 years.

Writers & Books and the local Frederick Douglass Bicentennial Commemoration Committee (<https://rocdouglass.com/2018/02/08/rochester-organizations-come-together-for-year-of-douglass/>) are also part of bringing the One Million Abolitionists program to Rochester. To learn more about the project, visit [fd2018.org](http://www.fd2018.org) (<http://www.fd2018.org/>).

Morris, on Thursday, April 5, will give a presentation (<http://www.sas.rochester.edu/aas/events/2018/04/one-million-abolitionists.html>) at the University of Rochester about the project, his family’s legacy, and using education to fight modern slavery. Hawkins-Carlson Room at Rush Rhees Library. Beginning at 5 p.m. Free and open to the public. 276-5744; [sas.rochester.edu/aas](http://www.sas.rochester.edu/aas/) (<http://www.sas.rochester.edu/aas/>).



Christopher Rhodes and Zymir McDowell with new bicentennial editions of Douglass's "Narrative."
Photo by Tianna Mañón