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# THE CAMBRIDGE COMPANION TO FREDERICK DOUGLASS

Frederick Douglass was born a slave and lived to become a best-selling author and a leading figure of the abolitionist movement. A powerful orator and writer, Douglass provided a unique voice advocating human rights and freedom across the nineteenth century, and remains an important figure in the fight against racial injustice. This Companion, designed for students of American history and literature, includes essays from prominent scholars working in a range of disciplines. Key topics in Douglass studies – his abolitionist work, oratory, and autobiographical writings – are covered in depth, and new perspectives on religion, jurisprudence, the Civil War, Romanticism, sentimentality, the black press, and transnationalism are offered. Accessible in style, and representing new approaches in literary and African American studies, this book is both a lucid introduction and a contribution to existing scholarship.

MAURICE S. LEE is Assistant Professor of English at Boston University. He is the author of *Slavery, Philosophy, and American Literature, 1830–1860* (Cambridge, 2005).

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To
Herlan O. Loyd
(1913–2001)
and
Marjorie L. Loyd
(born 1911)

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*Frederick Douglass: A Critical Reader* (1999) with Frank Kirkland, *Faces of Environmental Racism* with Laura Westra (2001), *My Bondage and My Freedom* (2002), and *Pragmatism and the Problem of Race* (2004) with Donald Koch.

MAURICE S. LEE is Assistant Professor of English at Boston University. He is the author of *Slavery, Philosophy, and American Literature, 1830–1860* (Cambridge University Press, 2005). Selected essays have appeared in *American Literature*, *African American Review*, *PMLA*, and *Raritan*. He is currently finishing a book on chance, scepticism, and belief in nineteenth-century American literature.

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culture. At present, she is completing a book on the Civil Rights Movement and cultural memory.

JOHN STAUFFER is Chair of the History of American Civilization and Professor of English and African and African American Studies at Harvard University. Among the leading scholars of the Civil War era and antislavery, he is the author or editor of seven books and more than forty-five articles, including *Giants: The Parallel Lives of Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln* (2008); *The Writings of James McCune Smith* (2006); *The Problem of Evil: Slavery, Freedom, and the Ambiguities of American Reform* (with Steven Mintz, 2006); and *The Black Hearts of Men: Radical Abolitionists and the Transformation of Race* (2002), which won four major awards, including the Frederick Douglass Book Prize, the Avery Craven Book Award, and the Lincoln Prize Runner-Up. His essays have appeared in *Time Magazine*, *The Times Literary Supplement*, *The New York Times Book Review*, *The Huffington Post*, *Raritan*, *New York Post*, and *21st: The Journal of Contemporary Photography*.

MAURICE O. WALLACE is Associate Professor of English and African and African American Studies at Duke University. Author of *Constructing the Black Masculine: Identity and Ideality in African American Men's Literature and Culture, 1775–1995* (2002), he teaches African American literary and cultural theory, nineteenth-century American literature, and gender studies. His essays have appeared in *American Literary History*, *Journal of African American History*, and several critical anthologies.



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# ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The same month that this volume went to the printers, Barack Obama became President of the United States. In his Inaugural Address – as in his other major speeches – Obama placed himself within America's longstanding struggle for equality and freedom. Frederick Douglass is one of Obama's forefathers, and it is a privilege to help readers engage Douglass's work at such a momentous time in United States history. Thanks to Ray Ryan of Cambridge University Press for approaching me regarding the project. Thanks to all the contributors for bringing their expertise to bear on Douglass's immense achievements. I am especially grateful to John Stauffer, Robert S. Levine, and Gene Jarrett for timely advice during the planning stages of the volume. John Barnard was also of great help in preparing the chronology and index. More broadly, I would like to thank the teachers who first led me to the study of slavery and African American literature. Clayborne Carson and the late Jay Fliegelman introduced me to Douglass and the history of civil rights in America. In graduate school, Richard Yarborough and Eric Sundquist took me deeper into both subjects. This volume would not have been imaginable without the lifelong contributions of scholars who established the study of Douglass. Many are acknowledged in the chapters that follow, though here I will mention Benjamin Quarles, Philip Foner, John Blassingame, and Henry Louis Gates, Jr. More personally, thanks to my excellent colleagues in the English department at Boston University for their support. And many thanks and much love to my ever-growing family: Marisa, Nico, and Matteo; Mom, Andrew, Yuko, and Jameson; Don and Linda Milanese and their extended family. To quote from Obama's Inaugural Address – and to think about the demands that Douglass places on his readers – it takes much support to remain "faithful to the ideals of our forebears, and true to our founding documents."



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# CHRONOLOGY OF DOUGLASS'S LIFE

| | |
|---|---|
| 1818 | Frederick Augustus Washington Bailey, son of Harriet Bailey, a slave, is born in Talbot County on the eastern shore of Maryland. His father is never identified but is widely thought to have been his mother's white master, Aaron Anthony. |
| 1824 | After being raised in relative comfort by his grandmother, he is taken to the Wye River plantation of Edward Lloyd, where Anthony lives and works as general overseer. Rejoins his younger siblings Perry, Sarah, and Eliza. Befriended by Lucretia Anthony Auld. |
| 1826 | Sent to Baltimore to live with the family of Hugh Auld, a shipbuilder and brother of Lucretia's husband, Thomas Auld. Serves as companion and protector to young Tommy Auld. |
| 1827 | At Douglass's request, Sophia Auld begins teaching him to read until Hugh Auld objects. Sent back to Talbot County for the disposition of Anthony's property. He is awarded to Thomas Auld, who returns him to service with Hugh and Sophia in Baltimore. |
| 1828–30 | Works in shipyard and secretly continues his studies. |
| 1831–32 | Meets Charles Lawson, a free African American who helps him to a religious conversion. Along with his continued Bible study, he obtains a copy of *The Columbian Orator*. |
| 1833 | Sent back to Thomas Auld at St. Michaels in Talbot County. Continues his studies and organizes lessons in religion and literacy for other African Americans. Sent to Edward Covey, a notorious "breaker" of slaves. |
| 1834 | Fights Covey to a stalemate, a major turning-point in his life. |



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1835 Works as a fieldhand for William Freeland. Organizes Sunday school and reading lessons for fellow slaves.

1836 Plots a failed escape with five other slaves. Returns to Baltimore, where he begins training as a ship caulker.

1837 Continues his education through the East Baltimore Mental Improvement Society, and resumes teaching. Meets Anna Murray, a free black woman working in Baltimore.

1838 Hires out his own labor until Auld rescinds his permission. With financial assistance from Murray, escapes on September 3, taking a train to Wilmington, then a steamer to Philadelphia. Arrives in New York on September 4. Introduced to David Ruggles, secretary of the New York Vigilance Committee. Douglass and Murray are married on September 15. Moves to New Bedford, where he changes his name to Douglass and joins the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church.

1839 Subscribes to William Lloyd Garrison's *The Liberator*, and attends antislavery speeches by Garrison, Wendell Phillips, and others. Douglass is licensed to preach and speaks frequently at his church and other meetings. Daughter Rosetta is born on June 24.

1840 His first son, Lewis Henry, is born in New Bedford on October 9.

1841 Speaks in New Bedford and at the convention of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in Nantucket, and becomes a general agent of that organization. Travels with prominent abolitionists, including John A. Collins, Garrison, and Phillips, speaking against slavery and northern racism.

1843 Travels with Charles Lenox Remond, Collins, and other abolitionists on the One Hundred Convention project. Attacked by a mob in Indiana, where his right hand is broken and permanently damaged. Attends National Convention of Colored Citizens in Buffalo.

1844 Because of his surpassing eloquence, white audiences begin to doubt his veracity and authenticity. Initial conflict arises between Douglass and his Anti-Slavery Society mentors, who press him to limit his speeches to the facts of his experience. Begins work on first autobiography.

1845–46 Final composition and publication of *The Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written By Himself*.



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| | |
|---|---|
| | The book is an immediate success, but the publicity puts him at risk for capture and rendition. In August 1845, embarks on an extended tour of England, Scotland, and Ireland. In 1846, together with Garrison, Douglass lectures widely on antislavery. Without his knowledge, British abolitionist friends Anna and Ellen Richardson raise the necessary funds to purchase his freedom from Hugh Auld, who had received the title to Douglass from his brother Thomas. Douglass defends the payment in a letter to *The Liberator*. |
| 1847 | Returns to the United States in April. With money from his English friends, purchases a printing press in Rochester, New York. In December, the first issue of *The North Star* appears. |
| 1848 | Continues lecturing in support of *The North Star*. Attends women's rights convention, where he speaks in favor of Elizabeth Cady Stanton's call for suffrage. Begins campaign to desegregate Rochester schools. Meets John Brown in Springfield, Massachusetts. Begins ongoing assistance to fugitive slaves fleeing to Canada. |
| 1849–50 | Breaking with Garrisonian ideology, he writes that the Constitution is not an inherently proslavery document. Argues strenuously against the Compromise of 1850, especially its reinvigorated Fugitive Slave Law. |
| 1851 | *The North Star* merges with Gerrit Smith's *Liberty Party Paper* to become *Frederick Douglass' Paper*. |
| 1852 | Delivers the address, "What to the Slave Is the Fourth of July?" Campaigns for Gerrit Smith, who wins a seat in Congress as an independent. |
| 1853 | Writes "The Heroic Slave." Split between Douglass and the Garrisonians widens. |
| 1854 | Denounces the Kansas–Nebraska Act. |
| 1855 | Completes and publishes his second autobiography, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, which meets with instant success, selling 15,000 copies in two months. |
| 1856 | Supports Gerrit Smith for President. Later endorses the Republican nominee, John C. Frémont, as the only viable antislavery candidate. |



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| | |
|---|---|
| 1858 | Begins publication of *Douglass' Monthly*. Praises Lincoln for his "House Divided" speech. Continues working to end northern segregation and capital punishment, and to promote women's rights. |
| 1859 | John Brown and his followers attack and occupy a federal arsenal at Harpers Ferry, Virginia. Despite his opposition to the plan, Douglass is implicated. Goes to Canada and then England for a lecture tour arranged prior to Brown's raid. |
| 1860 | Returns to the United States. Suspends publication of *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, but continues to publish the monthly. Expresses support for Lincoln and the Republican Party. Attends the Radical Abolition convention and is named as a party elector for New York State. South Carolina secedes from the Union on December 20. |
| 1861 | On April 12, a Confederate attack on Fort Sumter begins the Civil War. Douglass calls for the arming of slaves and free blacks. Criticizes Lincoln for his conciliatory attitude toward border states. |
| 1862 | Praises the abolition of slavery in the District of Columbia. Urges Great Britain not to recognize the Confederacy. Lincoln issues the Emancipation Proclamation, declaring all the slaves in the Confederacy, but not border states, to be free. |
| 1863 | Recruits for the Massachusetts 54th Infantry, the first black regiment in the Union army. Sons Charles and Lewis join the regiment. Meets with Lincoln to advocate equal pay, opportunity, and protection for black soldiers. |
| 1864 | Continues to criticize the Lincoln administration for unequal treatment of black soldiers and failure to support black suffrage, but endorses the president for re-election. |
| 1865 | Eulogizes Lincoln after his assassination on April 14. Joins Senator Charles Sumner and other radical Republicans to advocate national black suffrage. |
| 1866–69 | Splits with women's rights activists, including Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, in prioritizing black men's suffrage over women's suffrage. Supports Ulysses S. Grant for the presidency in 1868. |



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| | |
|---|---|
| 1870 | Becomes editor (and eventually owner) of *The New Era*, which he renames *The New National Era*. Moves to Washington, DC. |
| 1871 | Sent by President Grant as envoy to the Dominican Republic with the commission on annexation. |
| 1872 | Fire destroys Rochester home, along with the archives of *The North Star*, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, and *Douglass' Monthly*. Campaigns for Grant's re-election. |
| 1874 | Tries and fails to save the failing Freedman's Savings and Trust Company. *The New National Era* also fails. |
| 1876 | Campaigns for Republican Presidential candidate Rutherford B. Hayes. |
| 1877 | Disputed election results lead to the Compromise of 1877, which gives Hayes the White House, but removes northern troops from the South, effectively ending Reconstruction and leading to drastic political losses for African Americans. Hayes appoints Douglass US marshal for the District of Columbia. In June, Douglass returns to St. Michaels, where he meets with the 82-year-old Thomas Auld. |
| 1879 | Douglass delivers the principal eulogy for William Lloyd Garrison at the memorial service in Washington, DC. |
| 1880–81 | Backs Republican James A. Garfield. Garfield appoints Douglass as Recorder of Deeds for the District of Columbia. Writes and publishes his third autobiography, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. |
| 1882 | New edition of *Life and Times* is published. Neither edition is a success. After suffering a stroke in July, Anna Murray Douglass dies on August 4. |
| 1884 | Marries Helen Pitts, a white woman twenty years his junior. |
| 1886–87 | Resigns the office of Recorder. Travels to England, Scotland, Ireland, Italy, Greece, and Egypt. |
| 1888–89 | Supports successful candidacy of Republican Benjamin Harrison. Appointed consul general to Haiti. |
| 1890–91 | Involved in tense negotiations over American naval rights in Haiti. When Haiti rejects the US proposal, Douglass is accused in the press of excessive sympathy with the Haitians. |



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| | |
|---|---|
| 1892 | Lectures at Booker T. Washington's Tuskegee Institute. Befriends Ida Wells, a black journalist and anti-lynching activist. Publishes an expanded version of *Life and Times*. |
| 1893 | Serves as Haitian commissioner and lectures on Haitian independence at the World's Columbia Exposition in Chicago. Criticizes exclusion of blacks from the Exposition. Organizes performance by the young poet Paul Laurence Dunbar. |
| 1895 | On February 20, after addressing the National Council of Women in Washington, DC, Douglass collapses at home and dies of heart failure that evening. His body lies in state in Washington, and he is mourned and eulogized across the country. |



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# CITATIONS

The following abbreviations are used parenthetically throughout this volume to refer to Douglass's writings:

| | |
|---|---|
| N | Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave, Written By Himself* (1845) in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1994). |
| MB | Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom* (1855) in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1994). |
| LT | Frederick Douglass, *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881, 1892) in *Frederick Douglass: Autobiographies*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. (New York: Library of America, 1994). |
| FDP | *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, 5 vols., ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979–92). |
| LW | *The Life and Writings of Frederick Douglass*, 5 vols., ed. Philip S. Foner (New York: International Publishers, 1950–75). |



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