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.

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


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.”
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.
Chronology of Douglass’s Life

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.
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.


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.
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.
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

1882

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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<td>1892</td>
<td>Lectures at Booker T. Washington’s Tuskegee Institute. Befriends Ida Wells, a black journalist and anti-lynching activist. Publishes an expanded version of <em>Life and Times</em>.</td>
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<td>1895</td>
<td>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.</td>
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The following abbreviations are used parenthetically throughout this volume to refer to Douglass’s writings:


