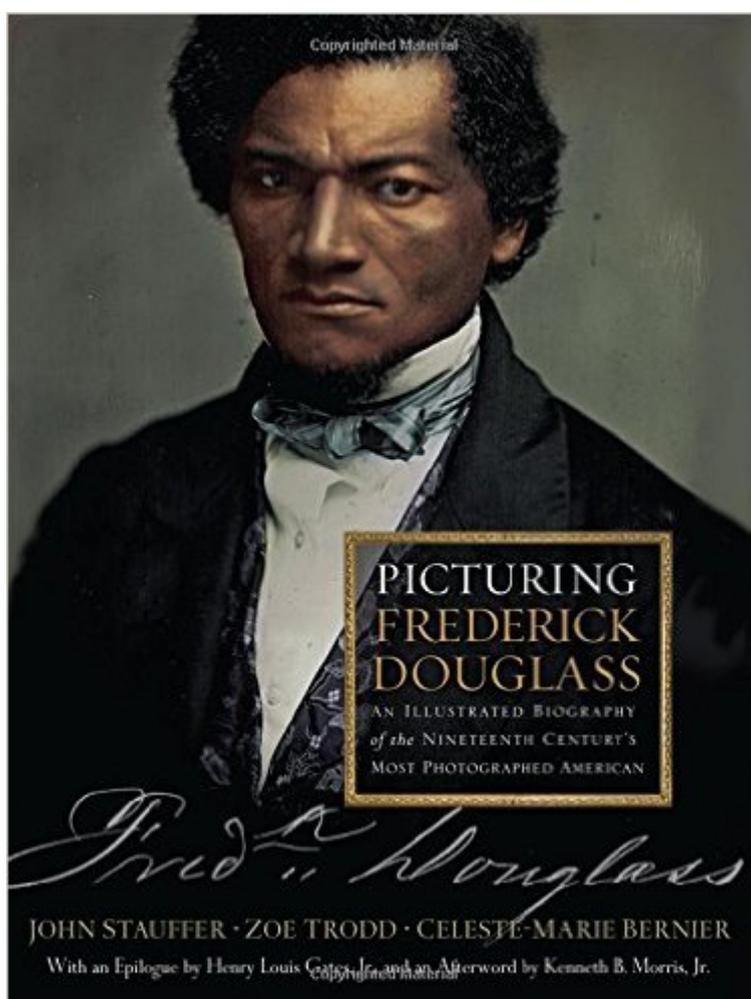


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Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography Of The Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American



Synopsis

A landmark and collectible volume—beautifully produced in duotone—that canonizes Frederick Douglass through historic photography. *Picturing Frederick Douglass* is a work that promises to revolutionize our knowledge of race and photography in nineteenth-century America. Teeming with historical detail, it is filled with surprises, chief among them the fact that neither George Custer nor Walt Whitman, and not even Abraham Lincoln, was the most photographed American of that century. In fact, it was Frederick Douglass (1818–1895), the ex-slave turned leading abolitionist, eloquent orator, and seminal writer whose fiery speeches transformed him into one of the most renowned and popular agitators of his age. Now, as a result of the groundbreaking research of John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, Douglass emerges as a leading pioneer in photography, both as a stately subject and as a prescient theorist who believed in the explosive social power of what was then just a nascent art form. Indeed, Frederick Douglass was in love with photography. During the four years of Civil War, he wrote more extensively on the subject than any other American, even while recognizing that his audiences were "riveted" by the war and wanted a speech only on "this mighty struggle." He frequented photographers' studios regularly and sat for his portrait whenever he could. To Douglass, photography was the great "democratic art" that would finally assert black humanity in place of the slave "thing" and at the same time counter the blackface minstrelsy caricatures that had come to define the public perception of what it meant to be black. As a result, his legacy is inseparable from his portrait gallery, which contains 160 separate photographs. At last, all of these photographs have been collected into a single volume, giving us an incomparable visual biography of a man whose prophetic vision and creative genius knew no bounds. Chronologically arranged and generously captioned, from the first picture taken in around 1841 to the last in 1895, each of the images—many published here for the first time—emphasizes Douglass's evolution as a man, artist, and leader. Also included are other representations of Douglass during his lifetime and after—such as paintings, statues, and satirical cartoons—as well as Douglass's own writings on visual aesthetics, which have never before been transcribed from his own handwritten drafts. The comprehensive introduction by the authors, along with headnotes for each section, an essay by Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and an afterword by Kenneth B. Morris, Jr.—a direct Douglass descendent—provide the definitive examination of Douglass's intellectual, philosophical, and political relationships to aesthetics. Taken together, this landmark work canonizes Frederick Douglass through a form he appreciated the most: photography. Featuring: Contributions from Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Kenneth B. Morris, Jr. (a direct Douglass descendent) 160 separate photographs of Douglass—many of which have never

been publicly seen and were long lost to historyA collection of contemporaneous artwork that shows how powerful Douglass's photographic legacy remains today, over a century after his deathAll Douglass's previously unpublished writings and speeches on visual aesthetics 317 illustrations

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

In "Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American", authors John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier argue "the photographs are then a kind of visual autobiography. If Douglass wrote himself into public existence with his narratives, he also photographed himself into public existence, evolving across the years as a freedom fighter, steely visionary, wise prophet, and elder statesman" (p. xxv). Stauffer, Trodd, and Bernier organize their work into five parts: the photographs themselves, contemporary artwork based on or used in place of photographs, the photographic legacy, Douglass's writings on photography, and a catalogue raisonné. In the first part, Stauffer, Trodd, and Bernier present the photographs chronologically with annotations about the photographers or similar photographs for which Douglass sat. They include with the photographs etchings based on them for newsprint, which nineteenth century readers considered as accurate as original photographs. The images show the transformation in Douglass's public image and demonstrate Douglass's own beliefs regarding photography. Both the contemporary artwork and photographic legacy parts focus on artwork that used Douglass to send a message. The contemporary artwork became more lifelike over time, likely due to the proliferation of Douglass's photographs and a demand for accurate

representations from consumers who now knew his true appearance without the filter of an artist. The modern artwork, appearing around the United States and in Ireland, uses Douglass's photographs as inspiration for murals, statues, stamps, and other public pieces.

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