

The title of this installation refers to the last major speech Douglass delivered before his death in 1895. Douglass appears on the pamphlet cover as an elder statesman, his distinguished image an assertion of his citizenship in the face of anti-Black racism, which included lynchings, voter suppression, and dehumanizing caricatures, as well as other forms of social, political, and economic disenfranchisement. All, he points out, were meant to prevent Black citizens' full participation in democracy.

When Douglass gave this speech to an audience of abolitionists as part of an Independence Day commemoration, he had been legally free for almost six years, but the institution of slavery was still in place. The following quote, featured in a scene of *Lessons of the Hour*, conveys his main argument:

“What, to the American slave, is your 4th of July? I answer; a day that reveals to him, more than all other days in the year, the gross injustice and cruelty to which he is the constant victim. To him, your celebration is a sham; your boasted liberty, an unholy license; your national greatness, swelling vanity; your sounds of rejoicing are empty and heartless; your denunciations of tyrants, brass fronted impudence; your shouts of liberty and equality, hollow mockery; your prayers and hymns, your sermons and thanksgivings, with all your religious parade, and solemnity, are, to him, mere bombast, fraud, deception, impiety, and hypocrisy—a thin veil to cover up crimes which would disgrace a nation of savages. There is not a nation on the earth guilty of practices, more shocking and bloody, than are the people of these United States, at this very hour.”

Scholars believe that this portrait was taken sometime in the months before Douglass went abroad to England, Scotland, and Ireland in 1845–47; during this trip, he acquired his manumission, or legal release from his enslaver. Douglass understood that dignifying images of Black people such as this portrait could help combat the dehumanization of Black individuals, and photography figured prominently in his fight for emancipation. That he sat for Southworth and Hawes, a preeminent studio in Boston, Massachusetts, attests to his public prominence less than five years into his career on the abolitionist circuit. The size and technical mastery of this daguerreotype make it exemplary among the 168 known photographs of Douglass.

Douglass wrote a series of lectures about photography during the first half of the 1860s, around the time these images were taken. One of these manuscripts is excerpted in *Lessons of the Hours* and is on display as a facsimile in the next case. In it, Douglass observed that through photography “men of all conditions may see themselves as others see them.” He also believed that photographs could serve as a means of self-representation for sitters, no matter one’s race, class, or gender. Douglass preferred to pose with a plain backdrop to encourage viewers to focus on his personhood. His first wife, Anna, whose domestic work supported his public life, does so here.

MoMA designed this wallpaper to illustrate aspects of Douglass's biography. Some items relate to scenes in *Lessons of the Hour*, including pictures of Douglass's home in Washington, DC, and of abolitionist photographer James Presley Ball's studio in Cincinnati, Ohio. Other items, such as news clippings assembled in family scrapbooks, reveal how Douglass's image and words circulated in the transatlantic nineteenth-century world. Pages from the four newspapers Douglass published (*The North Star*, *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, *Douglass' Monthly*, and *New National Era*) provide further insight into the debates that informed his ideas.

#### Digital Image Sources:

Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, New Haven (Walter O. Evans Collection of Frederick Douglass and Douglass Family Papers. James Weldon Johnson Collection in the Yale Collection of American Literature; Randolph Linsly Simpson African-American Collection. James Weldon Johnson Memorial Collection in the Yale Collection of American Literature)

Boston Public Library, Rare Books Department

Charles Deering McCormick Library of Special Collections, Northwestern University, Evanston, IL

Cincinnati Museum Center

Lavery Library, Special Collections, St. John Fisher University, Rochester

Library Company of Philadelphia

Library of Congress, Washington, DC (Manuscript Division, The Frederick Douglass Papers; Prints and Photographs Division; Rare Book and Special Collections Division; Serial and Government Publications Division)

The Miriam and Ira D. Wallach Division of Art, Prints and Photographs, The New York Public Library

National Library of Scotland, Special Collections, Edinburgh

National Museum of African American History and Culture, Smithsonian Institution, Washington, DC

Rochester Ladies' Anti-Slavery Society Papers, 1848–1868, William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor

Widener Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA

**Please be advised:** Some of these newspapers contain outdated and/or culturally insensitive terminology to describe racial identities, including quoted racial slurs. This language has been retained to provide historical context.