

**“Why not we endure hardship that our race may be free?”**  
***The Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass Family Papers***  
***Volume 1 (1846–1880) and Volume 2 (1881–1943)***  
**and *Douglass Family Lives: The Biography***

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Anon., *Anna Murray Douglass*, n.d. National Park Service FRDO246.

“Why not I endure hardship that my race may be free?”<sup>1</sup> These are the inspirational and revolutionary words belonging to Anna Murray Douglass (1813–1882). A trailblazing freedom fighter, fearless liberator, revolutionary thinker, brilliant intellectual, inspirational foodways specialist, outstanding household organizer, exceptionally accomplished business manager, expert seamstress, and pioneering social justice campaigner, among many more lifelong accolades and accomplishments, Anna Murray Douglass dedicated her life to the fight for equal rights for all. And yet, while Frederick Douglass, a world-renowned author, orator, philosopher, liberator, intellectual, editor, journalist, human rights campaigner, and her husband of over forty-four years, left behind thousands of his published and private writings, the revolutionary life and works of Anna Murray Douglass survive only in the “marks, traces, possibles, and probabilities” of the “chattel records” of a White-dominant Western imaginary.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Anna Murray Douglass’s powerful social justice declaration is quoted in “Press Release: Local Organization Invites Youth to Created Portraits of Anna Murray Douglass,” Frederick Douglass Family Initiatives, 8 October 2020, available online here: [https://fdfi.org/amd\\_portrait\\_contest/](https://fdfi.org/amd_portrait_contest/).

<sup>2</sup> Frederick Douglass, *The Heroic Slave* in Frederick Douglass, *My Bondage and My Freedom*, ed. Celeste-Marie Bernier (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019), 338, 337.

As Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry (1872–1943), one of the Douglasses’ granddaughters, writes in the foreword to the 1923 republication of *My Mother as I Recall Her*—the biography authored in 1900 by Rosetta Douglass Sprague (1839–1906), her mother and the Douglasses’ eldest daughter—“Too often are the facts of the great sacrifices and heroic efforts of the wives of renowned men overshadowed by the achievements of the men and the wonderful and beautiful part she has played so well is overlooked.”<sup>3</sup> Writing about the inspirational legacy of her own mother, Rosetta Douglass Sprague, Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry confides, “My mother’s devotion to her parents was complete and I am publishing this little booklet that the world may learn some thing of the noble woman who was the wife of a great man, well known—and the mother of his children.”<sup>4</sup> All too aware of the mind-, body-, and soul-destroying personal tragedies, struggles, and hardships endured by a “noble woman,” her grandmother Anna Murray Douglass, during her lifetime, Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry was equally painfully aware of the violences and injustices that were committed against her memory following her death. She was not alone.

In circa 1905, Lewis Henry Douglass (1840–1908), Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry’s uncle and the Douglasses’ eldest son, wrote an unpublished manuscript in which he powerfully traces “all along the line” of his father’s “work” by starting “from the beginning of the first days of his labors.” In these unpublished pages, he does justice to “the distresses, the anxieties, and the hardships that he [Frederick Douglass] and his family had to undergo in the struggle for the cause of liberty.”<sup>5</sup> Working to safeguard his mother’s memory for future generations, he remembers the intensive and unceasing labors of the “wife—the first Mrs. Douglass” who “worked early and late by the sunlight of day and the burning of the midnight oil at her duties of the household.” Writing of her very real sacrifices, he shares her experiences “at work binding shoes for the manufacturers of shoes in Lynn, Mass,” while he also confirms that she dedicated “her attention and what she could share in money to aid in the cause of Abolition.”

In the biography he includes in this manuscript, Lewis Henry Douglass draws attention to Anna Murray Douglass’s role as a mother by emphasizing that she undertook all these self-sacrificial activities “at the same time” as “having four children while her husband was away in the labors” of “fighting for the Emancipation of the people of her race.”<sup>6</sup> Nearly two decades later in 1917, Charles Remond Douglass (1844–1920), his youngest brother and the Douglasses’ youngest son, was equally careful to inform his audience, “My father’s home life during my childhood days was not prolonged.” “My mother was the head of the house,” he remembers, “she was the banker, the baker and general manager of the home. My father was in the field. The homecoming was for a brief season of rest from his labors.”<sup>7</sup>

Apart from the powerful testimonies provided by the Douglasses’ daughters, granddaughters, and sons, in which they categorically attest to the irrefutable and self-evident power of Anna Murray Douglass’s heroism, the painful reality is that her lifelong activism and liberationist work as voiced in her self-sacrificial determination “Why not I endure hardship that my race may be free?” has been willfully disrespected, dismissed, eradicated, and silenced within

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<sup>3</sup> Rosetta Douglass Sprague, *My Mother as I Recall Her*, in Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave*, ed. Celeste-Marie Bernier (Ontario: Broadview Press, 2018), 261.

<sup>4</sup> Sprague, *My Mother as I Recall Her*, 261.

<sup>5</sup> Lewis Henry Douglass, “Undated and Untitled Handwritten Statement” [c. 1905], in Douglass, *Narrative*, 270.

<sup>6</sup> Douglass, “Undated and Untitled Handwritten Statement,” 270–271.

<sup>7</sup> Charles Remond Douglass, “Some Incidents of the Home Life of Frederick Douglass” [c. February 1917], in Celeste-Marie Bernier and Andrew Taylor, *If I Survive: The Frederick Douglass Family in the Walter O. Evans Collection* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018), 672.

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a White-dominant imaginary. As of writing in 2021, it is not only the lifelong activism and liberationist work of Anna Murray Douglass that has been “overshadowed” and “overlooked,” but also the social justice campaigns and human rights advocacy that was the life’s work of all the Douglass daughters and sons: Rosetta Douglass Sprague (1839–1906); Lewis Henry Douglass (1840–1908); Frederick Douglass Jr. (1842–1892); Charles Remond Douglass (1844–1920); Annie Douglass (1849–1860).

The Douglasses’ daughters and sons were pioneering authors, orators, philosophers, intellectuals, historians, educators, freedom fighters, civil rights campaigners, editors, journalists, combat soldiers, printers, typesetters, archivists, household managers, foodways specialists, political commentators, community organizers, and social justice reformers in their own right, among much more. They held themselves accountable to their mother’s, no less than their father’s, human rights philosophy by dedicating their lives to the shared conviction: “Why not we endure hardship that our race may be free?”

Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry returns to her grandmother’s heroism in a 1933 article she published in the pages of *The Afro-American*, a newspaper printed in Baltimore. She begins the public letter she dedicates to Anna Murray Douglass’s revolutionary and radical life by declaring, “Steadfastly, uncomplainingly, efficiently, the wife of Frederick Douglass’s ‘youth’ laid the foundation that made possible for the husband and father to carry on.” Writing an emotionally unequivocal family biography, she bears powerful witness to the activist labors of the Douglasses’ daughters and sons: “Nor were those sacrifices borne *alone*—every one of those five children helped ‘father and mother’ to carry the load.” Throughout her article, she purposefully dispenses with all discussions of the solitary labors of iconic or isolated individuals in the Douglass family. Instead, she makes history by foregrounding the collective, collaborative, and intergenerational heroism of the entire Douglass family. For the first time, she puts on official public record that the Douglasses’ daughters and sons “accepted without a murmur their share of burdens—going oft-times supperless to thinly-clad, cold beds, shivering in scanty clothing to hostile school houses, bending over type-setters’ desks, proof-reading desks, leaving out of their lives all of those pleasures and sports so dear to the hearts of youth—regardless of ‘race, color or creed.’ ”<sup>8</sup>

Sacrificing their all and sharing immense burdens in their fight for all freedoms in their public lives, the Douglasses’ daughters and sons were an unending source of love, support, empathy, generosity, compassion, and strength for each other and for their mother and father in their private lives. As Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry recalls, not only did Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass “not have to listen to the whines and complaints registered against them because their children were forced to occupy adults’ places,” but they instead “gloried in the fact that those children understood, willingly cooperated and bent their young shoulders to their assigned duties with a will and determination to do all within their united child-power to help.”

As the culmination of over two decades of research across international print and digital as well as public and private archival collections and institutional holdings, I am currently in the final stages of completing three volumes: *The Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass Family Papers Volume 1 (1846–1880)* and *Volume 2 (1881–1943)* and *Douglass Family Lives: The Biography*. All three books are in the last stages of completion in readiness for publication in the fall of 2023 with Edinburgh University Press (U.S. co-publisher to be confirmed). They are each dedicated to Harriet Bailey (1792–c. 1825) and in memory of Eric Lowery (1948–2020), president of the Frederick Douglass Honor Society in Easton, Maryland.

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<sup>8</sup> Fredericka Douglass Sprague Perry, “Granddaughter of Frederick Douglass Defends His Colored Wife,” *The Afro-American*, 29 April 1933, 22.

*The Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass Family Papers Volume 1 (1846–1880)* and *Volume 2 (1881–1943)* are each over 350,000 words long and consist of individual timelines, an introduction, and annotated transcriptions of the over 850 published and unpublished speeches, letters, essays, and autobiographies authored by every member of the Douglass family and by their many granddaughters and grandsons. In preparing both volumes, I accompany each transcription with detailed scholarly annotations in which I provide in-depth information regarding directly relevant biographies of individuals, political events, and social, historical, and cultural contexts, as well as over 700 illustrations. *The Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass Family Papers Volume 1 (1846–1880)* and *Volume 2 (1881–1943)* are both dedicated to the lives and works of the Douglass family and of the Black and White liberators, radicals, and activists who were all integral to their world. I am forever grateful to Bill E. Lawson, Emeritus Distinguished Professor of Philosophy at the University of Memphis, for writing an inspirational foreword to the volume and to Nettie Washington Douglass III and Kenneth B. Morris Jr. for authoring their beautiful letters addressed to their current family members and future descendants.

As recently as 2015, Kenneth B. Morris Jr. states, “We need to know where we come from in order to know where we’re headed,” as he inspirationally informs his listeners, “There’s nothing you cannot do in your own lives to effect change.”<sup>9</sup> Speaking on the two-hundred year anniversary of Frederick Douglass’s birth in 2018, Nettie Washington Douglass III provides a powerful summary of the ongoing activist work of the Douglass family today by declaring, “We want to educate the public, especially young people and students. We want to provide information that may prevent young people themselves from becoming victims and help create global citizens.”<sup>10</sup>

*Douglass Family Lives: The Biography* is 350,000 words long and consists of 350 illustrations and 100 short chapters. In this volume, I share the individual and collective stories of the Douglass family’s intergenerational fight for all freedoms over the centuries by foregrounding the voices, testimonies, speeches, and writings of Anna Murray Douglass and Frederick Douglass and of each of their children and grandchildren.

For all three books, I am forever grateful to the inspirational generosity, wonderful support, and beautiful friendship of Dr. Walter O. and Linda Evans of the Walter O. and Linda Evans Foundation: without their permission to reproduce the Douglass family’s published and unpublished writings held in their Douglass Collection, and now located in the collections of the Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Yale University, it would not have been possible to complete the research and writing of these volumes.

In her intergenerational biography, *My Mother as I Recall Her*, Rosetta Douglass Sprague celebrates the “two lives” that were “embodied in the personalities of Frederick Douglass and Anna Murray Douglass, his wife.” As she writes, “They met at the base of a mountain of wrong and oppression, victims of the slave power as it existed over sixty years ago. One, smarting under the manifold hardships as a slave, the other in many ways suffering from the effects of such a system.”<sup>11</sup> Living with the reality that “the story of Frederick Douglass’ hopes and aspirations and longing desire for freedom has been told,” Rosetta Douglass Sprague writes the history of her

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<sup>9</sup> Stephen Magagnini, “Descendant of Douglass, Washington says fight against slavery continues,” *The Sacramento Bee*, 1 February 2015. <https://www.sacbee.com/news/local/article8911028.html> (subscription required).

<sup>10</sup> Donna M. Owens, “Frederick Douglass’ Descendants Want His Story to Inspire 200 Years After His Birth,” 8 March 2018. Available online here: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/frederick-douglass-descendants-want-his-story-inspire-200-years-after-n854826>.

<sup>11</sup> Sprague, *My Mother as I Recall Her*, 262.

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mother’s life only a few years after her father’s death out of a heartfelt determination to inform her readers that “it was a story made possible through the unswerving loyalty of Anna Murray.”<sup>12</sup>

Over a century later, I have researched, edited, and annotated *The Anna Murray and Frederick Douglass Family Papers Volume 1 (1846–1880)* and *Volume 2 (1881–1943)* and authored *Douglass Family Lives: The Biography* for the political, historical, and social justice purpose of ensuring “that the world may learn something” of the “unswerving loyalty” of Anna Murray Douglass, as well as of every Douglass family member. As we learn in their visionary activist and liberationist writings, they lived their lives by the principles, policies, and practices of their united self-sacrificial conviction “Why not we endure hardship that our race may be free?”

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<sup>12</sup> Sprague, *My Mother as I Recall Her*, 263.