

THE RIGHT TO BE SEEN



Sojourner Truth. Frederick Douglass.
Portraits, manuscript pages, and two accounts of a speech.

The person and the surviving record.

A portrait can remain familiar long after the words and choices of the person pictured have become difficult to recover. This reader places photographs beside records that let us ask who controlled the image, who printed the words, and what survives of the encounter.

It follows two people who understood the public work of a likeness: Sojourner Truth and Frederick Douglass. It also follows a speech through two newspaper accounts. The documents do not erase uncertainty. They give us a way to make it visible.

The photographs are archival. The articles are original editorial checked against the cited records. No interview, eyewitness scene, or historical face was invented. Full source notes follow each feature.

IN THIS READER

She sold the picture. She kept the name.

Sojourner Truth used a portrait card to connect her public image to the support of a living person.

A likeness within reach

Frederick Douglass left an argument about who could possess a picture, and how pictures could change a society.

One speech, two printed lives

An 1851 newspaper report and an 1863 recollection carry different versions of Sojourner Truth's speech.

She sold the picture. She kept the name.

Sojourner Truth used a portrait card to connect her public image to the support of a living person.

There is a photograph, and there is the sentence beneath it. Sojourner Truth sits beside a table, with knitting in her hands and a book nearby. Her name is printed across the bottom of the card. Immediately above it comes a declaration:

I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance.

The words belong to the object. They are visible on the surviving card, not a line supplied by a novelist or an interviewer imagined after the fact. The Library of Congress dates this portrait to approximately 1864 and records the slogan beneath it. Its notes also record copyright in Truth's name that year. [1]

The sentence makes the photograph something more specific than a likeness. It identifies an exchange. A buyer can take away an image; the person pictured needs the income that sale provides. The distinction between shadow and substance is unusually economical: the reproduction travels, while a living body still has to be supported.

That reading has a practical basis. The Smithsonian's National Portrait Gallery describes Truth selling copies of her photograph and her narrative to support her antislavery campaigning. The institution places those sales within her public life, rather than treating the card as a private keepsake that accidentally became famous. [2] This was an image with work to do.

Look again at the full card. The frame, the pose, the text, and the name all reach us together. A crop that retains only the face may be visually striking, but it removes the terms under which the object introduced its subject. In this case, the margin is part of the story. It tells a reader that the woman has a name and that the picture is being offered for a stated purpose.

The book and the knitting invite interpretation, but they also set a limit. We can see objects arranged in the photograph. We cannot identify the book from this view, recover everything that happened in the studio, or know what Truth thought while sitting for it. The Smithsonian's discussion of her portraiture likewise notes uncertainty about the book. [3] A good caption should not turn a suggestive prop into a proven memory.

This distinction matters particularly when a person survives in several kinds of records. A portrait shows a pose. A printed caption supplies words attached to that portrait. A newspaper supplies a reporter's account. A later memoir supplies a memory, edited and published at another moment. The records can illuminate one another, but none should silently stand in for all the others.

Truth's best-known speech illustrates the difficulty. The Smithsonian's *The Whole Truth* examines the differences between the 1851 reporting associated with Marius Robinson and the later version associated with Frances Dana Gage. [3] Those versions need comparison, not a composite assembled into a supposedly exact speech. A quotation can be famous and still require a careful explanation of how it reached print.

The newspaper comparison now has a firm source to examine. We located and visually inspected the Library of Congress's reproduction of the passage from the June 21, 1851 *Anti-Slavery Bugle*, fourth newspaper page (continuous issue pagination 160). The reported speech includes "I am a woman's rights." That is a sentence in Robinson's printed account, not a claim that an audio recording proves her exact delivery. The later famous refrain does not appear in that reproduced speech passage. [5]

The portrait is already a different sort of evidence. Its slogan can be checked against the pictured object. It gives the feature an unusually firm point of contact: here are the printed words, here is the card that carries them, and here is the named person it represents. We do not need to invent a conversation to make that encounter consequential.

For a magazine working with archives, the task is to restore those connections. Put the name back beside the face. Keep the caption with the photograph when the caption changes its meaning. Find the speaker's words where they survive, and identify the intermediary when they reach us through someone else. If a record cannot be found, say what remains unknown.

Truth's card offers both an object to study and a reminder about the economics of a public image. The picture was reproducible. The substance was a person. An archive may preserve the first long after the second has died; an editorial should work to bring the two back into relation.



Sojourner Truth
Circa 1864
Photographer unidentified

Library of Congress
LC-DIG-ppmsca-08978
Item 98501244

Full card retained. Its printed name
and slogan are part of the
evidence.

Read the records

1. Library of Congress, Sojourner Truth, item 98501244, circa 1864. Catalog metadata downloaded and original-item JPEG inspected October 14, 2026. Printed slogan visually verified on LC-DIG-ppmsca-08978.

<https://www.loc.gov/item/98501244/>

2. Smithsonian National Portrait Gallery, Out of Many: Portraits from 1600 to 1900, Sojourner Truth entry. Institutional historical context for sales of the narrative and photographs.

<https://npg.si.edu/exhibition/out-of-many>

3. Smithsonian Institution, The Whole Truth, Sidedoor episode and transcript. Used for the reported speech-version distinction and acknowledged uncertainty about the book. This is modern scholarship/commentary, not a primary nineteenth-century source.

<https://www.si.edu/sidedoor/whole-truth>

4. Related Smithsonian object: Cabinet card of Sojourner Truth, NMAAHC 2013.207.1, dated 1864, public-domain media and CC0 metadata. This is a related object, not proof that the Smithsonian and Library cards are the same physical print.

https://www.si.edu/object/cabinet-card-sojourner-truth%3Anmaahc_2013.207.1

5. Anti-Slavery Bugle, June 21, 1851, fourth page / continuous pagination 160, reproduced excerpt hosted by the Library of Congress and visually inspected October 14, 2026. Provenance/caption: . Full-page direct endpoint remains inaccessible; the evidence inspected here is the institution's excerpt, not the whole page.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/files/2021/04/Sojourner-Truth-speech-in-Anti-Slavery-Bugle-cropped.jpg>

<https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/2021/04/sojourner-truths-most-famous-speech/>

Reuse: LOC portrait item states no known restrictions on publication. The related Smithsonian object is a separate physical print with public-domain media. No exclusive ownership of archive material is claimed.

A likeness within reach

Frederick Douglass left an argument about who could possess a picture, and how pictures could change a society.

Frederick Douglass did not treat a photograph as a minor convenience. In a manuscript cataloged by the Library of Congress as an 1861 "Lecture on Pictures," he placed pictures beside other inventions that had altered the shape of modern life. A passage about celebrated inventors gives way to an inserted line about the father of modern pictures being overlooked. The page is visibly a working document: additions crowd the margins and sentences are crossed out. [1]

The changes matter. They bring us close to an argument being composed, rather than a slogan extracted from a finished monument. Douglass is considering what a new abundance of pictures does to a society. The question is not only whether a photograph resembles someone. It is also who can possess a likeness, how it circulates, and what habits of looking that circulation creates.

One of the clearest claims sits on the next leaf. In a discussion of the ordinary rule that demand regulates supply, he writes:

Supply regulated demand.

The three words are visible on manuscript image 3, numbered page 2. They describe his argument about pictures becoming abundant and accessible. They are not a universal promise that manufacturing more products creates paying customers. [1]

Douglass gives that abundance a social geography. Small towns have picture galleries; even a crossroads can acquire one. A farmer can have practical work done for a horse and obtain a picture of himself. Those observations, paraphrased from the same leaf, imagine photography entering the places and transactions of ordinary life. The gallery is no longer only a destination for a person with money to spare on a grand portrait.

In another passage, on manuscript image 2, the comparison becomes sharper. The likeness that had been a luxury of the wealthy is presented as something now available to a servant girl whose income is small. This is Douglass's assertion in a draft, not independent proof that every studio charged an affordable price or every person had equal access. The force of the passage lies in the comparison he chooses: representation as a possession that should no longer mark only status. [1]

The portrait reproduced here gives the argument a face. The Metropolitan Museum of Art dates this daguerreotype to approximately 1855 and identifies the photographer as unknown. Its collection entry describes Douglass's use of photography to oppose distorted representations of African Americans and notes that he circulated portraits in several formats over decades. [2] The museum's account supplies historical interpretation; the object supplies one particular surviving likeness.

We should not make the photograph say more than it can. Its pose and clothing are visible. The circumstances of this sitting are not established by the object record. A reader cannot reconstruct the conversation with the photographer, the time required to hold the pose, or Douglass's private response to the finished plate. Nor is the image evidence that he had already formulated every argument of his later lecture.

Placed beside the manuscript, however, it changes the reader's encounter with both. The subject of the picture is also a writer thinking about pictures. He is not merely available for our inspection; he left arguments about the medium through which we inspect him. The archive lets us place a represented person and a person making claims about representation on the same spread.

Sojourner Truth's portrait card offers a useful comparison. Its printed sentence connects the sale of a likeness to the support of a living person. Douglass's manuscript connects the availability of likenesses to social life. The objects are different: one is a card intended to circulate, the other a working text. Neither needs to be reduced to an inspirational quotation to remain powerful.

A reader may notice something else in the manuscript: revision. The insertions, deletions, and shifts of emphasis interrupt any temptation to treat nineteenth-century speech as a single clean text waiting for us to copy. A handwritten lecture draft is evidence of composition. It does not tell us exactly which sentences an audience heard on a particular evening.

That is why the page belongs in the issue, not just the quotation. The original image makes the editorial's work inspectable. The reader can find the line, see what surrounds it, and understand the kind of source being used. The publication adds context and a route through the documents; it does not replace the documents with a confident voice of its own.

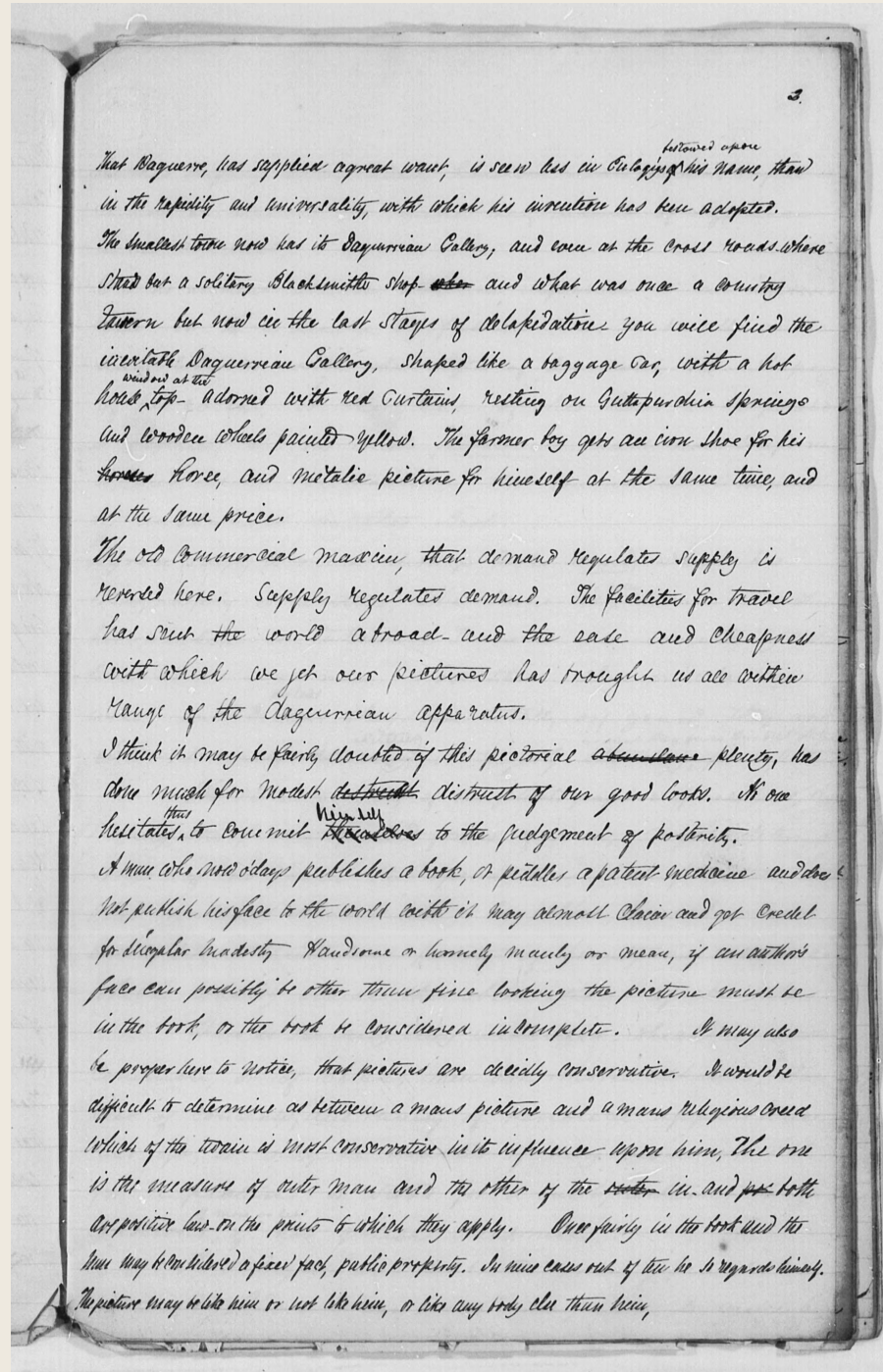
Douglass's question remains productive for an archive magazine. A portrait can endure as a recognizable face while the person's words become detached from it. Bringing them together restores something important: the photographed subject's capacity to think about how images work. The likeness becomes an entry into an argument, rather than the end of one.



Frederick Douglass
Circa 1855
Photographer unknown
Daguerreotype

The Metropolitan Museum of Art
The Rubel Collection, Gift of William
Rubel, 2001
Accession 2001.756

The photograph predates the lecture
manuscript. It is not a picture of that
lecture being delivered.



"Supply regulated demand."

Frederick Douglass, Lecture on Pictures, cataloged 1861.

Digital image 3; manuscript page 2.
The selected sentence appears in the central paragraph.

Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Frederick Douglass Papers.

This is a lecture draft, not a verbatim record of a delivered speech.

Original leaf retained, including deletions and insertions. Resource: mss11879.22004. The collection is identified by LOC as public domain and free to use and reuse.

Read the records

1. Library of Congress, Manuscript Division, Frederick Douglass Papers, "1861, Lecture on Pictures, title varies," item mss1187900394; resource mss11879.22004. Image 2 is manuscript page 1; image 3 is manuscript page 2. Images downloaded and visually inspected October 14, 2026. Quote is on image 3, central paragraph. ;

<https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1187900394/>

<https://www.loc.gov/resource/mss11879.22004/?sp=3>

2. The Metropolitan Museum of Art, Frederick Douglass, unknown American photographer, circa 1855, accession 2001.756. Object and rights statement retrieved October 14, 2026.

<https://www.metmuseum.org/art/collection/search/282066>

3. Library of Congress, Frederick Douglass and the Power of Pictures, February 28, 2020. Used for orientation, not as a substitute for manuscript inspection.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/picturethis/2020/02/frederick-douglass-and-the-power-of-pictures/>

Reuse: portrait marked Public Domain by the Met. Manuscript: LOC Frederick Douglass Papers, public domain and free to use/reuse. Unknown photographer and approximate portrait date retained.

One speech, two printed lives

An 1851 newspaper report and an 1863 recollection carry different versions of Sojourner Truth's speech.

In the newspaper excerpt published in 1851, Sojourner Truth begins by asking permission to speak. An affirmative answer is reported. Then the account gives her a striking sentence:

I am a woman's rights.

The grammar may surprise a reader expecting a familiar slogan. That surprise is worth keeping. The words are visible in the reproduced passage from the Anti-Slavery Bugle of June 21, 1851, rather than being supplied by a modern editorial to make the speech sound more familiar. [1]

The passage moves through physical work, strength, food, intellect, and biblical examples. Near its close, women are described as coming forward; men occupy a difficult position between their demands and those of enslaved people. A reader can trace an argument in this account without finding the refrain that later became attached to the speech.

The excerpt is not the only part of the evidence. A reproduced introductory paragraph, also supplied by the Library of Congress, says the speech cannot be adequately transferred to paper. It points to Truth's gestures, presence, and voice as things the report cannot preserve. [2] The nineteenth-century account is making its own limitation explicit.

That admission complicates the word transcript. Printed quotation marks can look precise, but they do not prove that a reporter captured each spoken word exactly. The surviving newspaper is direct evidence of what the newspaper printed. It is also an intermediary between a person speaking and a person reading years later.

Twelve years after the Akron convention, Frances Dana Gage's account appeared in print. The Library of Congress identifies its publication in The Independent on April 23, 1863, and the National Anti-Slavery Standard on May 2, 1863. [3] We inspected the Library's reproduction of column 4 from the latter publication. Its language and its rendering of Truth's voice differ substantially from the 1851 passage. [4]

The two accounts do share an argument a reader can recognize. Both use a comparison between a small measure and a larger one to discuss intellect and rights. Both discuss Christianity and woman's place in its story. Shared themes, however, are not identical wording. An editor who takes the familiar phrase from one version and the tighter argument from another creates a third text.

The later account gives much more space to the reactions of the crowd. It describes gestures and intense emotion. Those descriptions are part of Gage's recollection as it reached print; they are not an invitation for this magazine to write an eyewitness scene in its own voice. We can compare the records without pretending to stand in the hall.

The difference also reaches beyond wording. The Library's historical analysis points out that Gage rendered Truth's voice in a Southern dialect, whereas Truth had been enslaved in New York and first spoke Dutch. [3] That is an important reason to identify the version whenever quoting. The accent a printed account appears to give a person can become part of the public's picture of her.

There is no need to discard a record because it is difficult. The 1851 report and the later recollection each belong to the history of how the speech circulated. Their disagreements are part of the story. The publication's responsibility is to keep the dates, writers, and kinds of evidence visible enough that the reader can understand what is being compared.

Truth's portrait card offers a different contact with her public image. Its name and slogan survive on the physical object. A printed speech report offers words mediated by a recorder. A later account adds another interval and another writer. Placing them together does not produce perfect access to Truth. It does show the routes through which her image and words reached others.

In an archive edition, an unresolved difference can be more illuminating than a polished certainty. The useful question is not simply which sentence is most memorable. It is who printed it, when, from what position, and how we know.

May I say a few words? Receiving an affirmative answer, she proceeded; I want to say a few words about this matter. I am a woman's rights. I have as much muscle as any man, and can do as much work as any man. I have plowed and reaped and husked and chopped and mowed, and can any man do more than that? I have heard much about the sexes being equal; I can carry as much as any man, and can eat as much too, if I can get it. I am as strong as any man that is now. As for intellect, all I can say is, if woman have a pint and man a quart—why cant she have her little pint full? You need not be afraid to give us our rights for fear we will take too much,—for we cant take more than our pint'll hold. The poor men seem to be all in confusion, and dont know what to do. Why children, if you have woman's rights give it to her and you will feel better. You will have your own rights, and they wont be so much trouble. I cant read, but I can hear. I have heard the bible and have learned that Eve caused man to sin. Well if woman upset the world, do give her a chance to set it right side up again. The Lady has spoken about Jesus, how he never spurned woman from him, and she was right. When Lazarus died, Mary and Martha came to him with faith and love and besought him to raise their brother. And Jesus wept—and Lazarus came forth. And how came Jesus into the world? Through God who created him and woman who bore him. Man, where is your part? But the women are coming up blessed be God and a few of the men are coming up with them. But man is in a tight place, the poor slave is on him, woman is coming on him, and he is surely between-a hawk and a buzzard.

1851 / Anti-Slavery Bugle
June 21, fourth page / continuous pagination 160.
Institution-hosted speech excerpt; original column unconfirmed.

ar'n't I a woman? Den dey talks 'bout dis ting in de head. What dis dey call it?" "Intellect," whispered some one near. "Dat's it, honey. What's dat got to do with woman's rights or niggers' rights? If my cup won't hold but a pint and yourn holds a quart wouldn't ye be mean not to let me have my little half-measure full?" and she pointed her significant finger and sent a keen glance at the minister who had made the argument. The cheering was long and loud. "Den dat little man in black dar, he say woman can't have as much right as man 'cause Christ wa'n't a woman. Whar did your Christ come from?"

Rolling thunder could not have stilled that crowd as did those deep, wonderful tones, as she stood there with outstretched arms and eye of fire. Raising her voice still louder, she repeated—

"Whar did your Christ come from? From God and a woman. Man had not'ing to do with him." Oh! what a rebuke she gave the little man. Turning again to another objector, she took up the defence of Mother Eve. I cannot follow her through it all. It was pointed and witty and solemn, eliciting at almost every sentence deafening applause; and she ended by asserting "that if de fust woman God ever made was strong enough to turn de world upside down all her one lone, all dese togeder," and she glanced her eye over us, "ought to be able to turn it back and git it right side up again, and now dey is asking to, de men better let 'em" (long continued cheering). "'Bleeged to ye for hearin' on me, and now ole Sojourner ha'n't got nothin' more to say."

Amid roars of applause she turned to her corner, leaving more than one of us with streaming eyes and hearts beating with gratitude. She had taken us up in her great, strong arms and carried us safely over the slough of difficulty, turning the whole tide in our favor.

1863 / National Anti-Slavery Standard
May 2, page 4, column 4. Frances Dana Gage account. Both reproductions supplied by the Library of Congress.

Read the records

1. Anti-Slavery Bugle, June 21, 1851, fourth page / continuous pagination 160; speech excerpt reproduced by the Library of Congress. Phrase visually checked on October 14, 2026.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/files/2021/04/Sojourner-Truth-speech-in-Anti-Slavery-Bugle-cropped.jpg>

2. Same newspaper and date, introductory commentary excerpt reproduced by LOC.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/files/2021/04/Robinson-commentary-on-Sojourner-Truth-speech-in-Anti-Slavery-Bugle.jpg>

3. Arlene Balkansky, Library of Congress, Sojourner Truth's Most Famous Speech, April 7, 2021. Institutional provenance, publication dates, and historical context; this modern article was not copied wholesale.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/2021/04/sojourner-truths-most-famous-speech/>

4. Frances Dana Gage account, National Anti-Slavery Standard, May 2, 1863, page 4, column 4, reproduced by LOC. Visually inspected.

<https://blogs.loc.gov/headlinesandheroes/files/2021/04/Col-4-Sojourner-Truth-in-National-Anti-Slavery-Standard-May-2-1863-p-4.jpg>

Evidence note: excerpts, not complete newspaper pages, were inspected. Printed accounts mediate spoken words. Do not combine versions into a supposedly exact speech.

Pictures travel. People need context.

This first archive reader brings three editorials together. It is part of a ten-issue research series reaching toward the beginnings of photography and following named people through surviving pictures, manuscripts, and contemporary reporting.

Global Risqué also seeks original documentary stories from contributors local to the places they cover. The Jakarta project is separate from this archive edition. Public-domain reproductions here are nonexclusive; original commissioned work requires its own agreed publication rights.

Prepared October 14, 2026. No new field reporting or interviews conducted. Photographs and document excerpts are credited to their creators when identified and to the holding repositories. No colorization, reconstructed faces, or invented quotations.

Read the archive: globalrisque.com/archive

Corrections and reader notes: editor@globalrisque.com

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