



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE  
April 2, 2018

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## Photographs Shine at Swann Galleries' African Americana Auction New Record for a Signed Frederick Douglass Photograph at \$30k

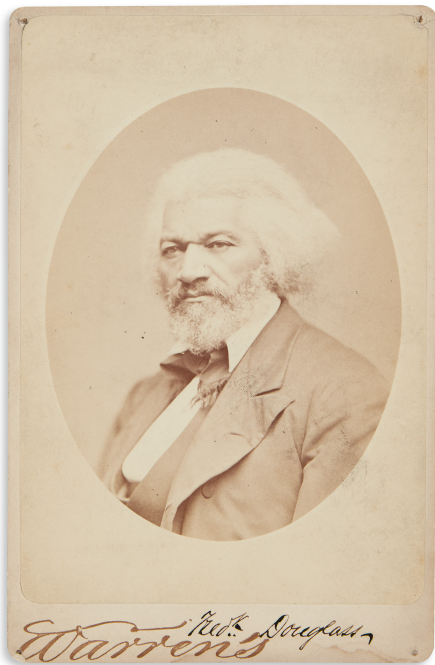


**New York**—Institutional purchases dominated the buying field at **Swann Galleries'** auction of **Printed & Manuscript African Americana** on **March 29**. The top lots of the auction were almost entirely manuscripts, archives, early photographs or otherwise unique material. A large percentage—four of the top five, and 13 of the top 20—will be joining public collections.

The auction was led by an **album of cartes-de-visite** featuring abolitionists and African Americans from the Boston area. The most popular lot during the preview week, it was something like a "little sister" to the album handled by Swann in 2017 that contained a previously unrecorded photograph of Harriet Tubman. It was purchased by an institution for \$47,500, above a high estimate of \$9,000.

An archive of six letters by Frederick Douglass, which had remained in a family collection since their receipt, led a significant selection of material related to the abolitionist. The correspondence, addressed to his friend Ebenezer Bassett, concerned race relations, Haiti and politics; it provides fascinating new insights into the mindset of one of the greatest Americans toward the end of his life (\$42,500). The only known complete copy of *Farewell Song of Frederick Douglass, on Quitting England for America—the Land of his Birth*, a songbook by Julia and T. Powis Griffiths, flew past its high estimate of \$7,500 to reach \$37,500. Another Douglass highlight was a **signed cabinet card with his photograph**, taken by George Kendall Warren. The image was used as the frontispiece for his third autobiography; it was purchased by an institution for \$30,000, double its high estimate, and a record for a signed photograph of Douglass.

Additional records were set throughout the sale. A rare variant printing of the famous *Plan of an African Ship's Lower Deck, with Negroes, in the Proportion of Not Quite One to a Ton*, 1789, a powerful image from the early abolitionist movement, brought \$16,250—a record for any of the dozens of versions



issued. The classic freedman's education narrative *Mary S. Peake, the Colored Teacher at Fortress Monroe*, circa 1863, by Lewis C. Lockwood, set a record at \$3,750, while the first edition of Zora Neale Hurston's *Mules and Men*, 1935, reached a record \$4,250.

An archive of photographs from Café Society, the first important integrated nightclub in America, includes candid images of Lucille Ball, Rita Hayworth and Frank Sinatra, along with shots of performances by the Andrews Sisters and Josh White, Count Basie and various jazz ensembles. The nearly 300 photographs were found among the papers of the club's promoter, Ivan Black, after it was unceremoniously closed in 1948. The archive was purchased for \$20,000, above a high estimate of \$3,000.

Specialist Rick Stattler noted that "after 22 years of fine catalogues put out by my predecessor Wyatt Houston Day, it was a challenge to do credit to this sale. Fortunately, the market for this important material shows no signs of slowing down. While results were strong overall, it was the most rare and unique material in this sale that brought out stiff competition, particularly

from the institutional buyers."

The next auction of **Americana** at Swann Galleries will be **Printed & Manuscript Americana** on April 12, 2018. The house is currently accepting quality consignments for autumn auctions.

Additional highlights can be found [here](#).

#### Captions:

[Lot 47](#): Carte-de-visite album with 83 images of prominent African Americans and abolitionists, circa 1860s. Sold March 29, 2018 for \$47,500. (Pre-sale estimate: \$6,000 to \$9,000)

[Lot 190](#): Frederick Douglass, Signed cabinet card, by George Kendall Warren, Boston, circa 1879. Sold March 29, 2018 for \$30,000, an auction record for a signed photograph of Douglass. (Pre-sale estimate: \$10,000 to \$15,000)

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Swann Auction Galleries is a third-generation family business as well as the world's largest auction house for works on paper. In the last 75 years, Swann has repeatedly revolutionized the trade with such innovations as the first U.S. auction dedicated to photographs and the world's only department of African-American Fine Art. More than 30 auctions and previews are held annually in Swann Galleries' two-floor exhibition space in Midtown Manhattan, and online worldwide. Visit [swannalleries.com](http://swannalleries.com) for more information.