

Violinist Joseph Douglass (1869/71 – December 1935)



Joseph Douglass was born on July 3, 1869. He was an African American violinist and composer, and the grandson of Frederick Douglass he was born in the Anacostia area of Washington D.C. to Charles and Mary Elizabeth Douglass, their second child and only that would live to adulthood. Following in the path of his famous grandfather and father, Joseph took up the violin at a young age, receiving classical training at the New England Conservatory for five years and later the Boston Conservatory.

Douglass received his first big break as a concert violinist at the age of 22 when he performed at the World's Columbian Exposition, also known as the Chicago World's Fair.

On August 25, 1893 performers joined together to celebrate Colored American Day, which Frederick Douglass helped plan years before. Included in the celebrations were readings of Paul Lawrence Dunbar's poetry, performances by Sidney Woodward and Deseria Plato.

Douglass is credited as the first Black violinist to make transcontinental tours. In the 1890s, the black press as “the most talented violinist of the race” lauded him. Douglass toured extensively for three decades, performing in every Black educational institution and America and a significant amount of churches as well. Douglass was also the first violinist- of any race- to make recordings for the Victor Talking Machine Company. He made recordings with them in 1914, but they were never released. On top of his performance career, Douglass was an educator and conductor, too.

He had tenured positions at Howard University and the Colored Music Settlement School in New York throughout his life. He had many students including a young Clarence Cameron White. Douglass was married to Fannie Howard Douglass, a musician as well who often accompanying his performances on the piano. The couple had two children: Blanche and Frederick III. His appearances at the White House were regularly scheduled during administrations of Presidents McKinley, Roosevelt, and Taft, after which he undertook concert work.” If only his grandfather had been there to see it. Joseph Douglass Grandson of the noted statesman Frederick Douglass, Joseph was a gifted violinist who performed in the White House not only for President William McKinley, but also later for President William Howard Taft. Joseph Douglass died in December, 1935 (Retrieved from <https://aaregistry.org/story/violinist-joseph-douglass-born/>).