Years ago, during the late 1970s, in my then-incarnation as chief historian of the National Portrait Gallery, I put together a symposium in which biographers were gathered, not to speak about their subjects, as was customary, but about themselves in relationship to their subjects. In these days of a true biography boom, it may no longer seem unusual to notice that biographers are not simply neutral observers. But our session may have been the first national occasion to recognize that biographies are essentially collaborations between two lives. I called the book that came out of this landmark session *Telling Lives*. Sometimes, of course, people misheard the title.

There were some who wondered why the National Portrait Gallery—which they associated primarily with wonderful paintings, sculptures, prints, and photographs—was concerned with writers at all. But the answer was simple. The Portrait Gallery is a place to recognize significant American lives, and it is no stretch at all to call biographers portraitists in words rather than in paint, stone, or graphic image. In fact, biographers often borrow the terminology of visual art to describe their “profiles” or “vignettes.” And like biographers, portraitists bring something of themselves to the portrayal. All those who depict a life are involved, to one degree or another, in a balancing act of objectivity and subjectivity.

And to the written and painted portrait the Gallery has added over the years the “live” portrait in two significant ways. The first has been a performance series called alternately “Portraits in Motion” and “Cultures in Motion,” in which actors bring to life a great figure from our past. In our Gallery’s beautiful spaces, and soon in venues around the city and perhaps the nation, audiences will get a chance to “meet” figures like Thomas Jefferson or Paul Robeson, to hear them say the words we normally encounter on the written page. No biographer has studied any more deeply than these scholar-actors every nuance of these lives, the motives that drove them to greatness, and the passions and confusions that raged within them.

Another form of live portraiture or biography is one I have been particularly committed to, even during that decade away from the Portrait Gallery—that of the grand public interview. Having noticed that fewer and fewer Americans were having their portrait taken, we decided to create a series called “Living Self-portraits,” whose principal “conceit” was that I, as interviewer, was the brush in the hand of Agnes de Mille, for example, or Senator William Fulbright. These events allow the subjects, through apt questions, to reflect on the direction their lives have taken. The video camera is there as well, to capture the telling gestures and expressions, the physical embodiment of the life story they are sharing.

It is wonderful that our nation has set aside a place for lives impressively lived and impressively told.
Whose Life Is It Anyhow?

Then & Now

The Public Life

Appearances Are Deceiving: Henry James

Curator’s Choice

George Washington

Q&A

Interview with David Levering Lewis, biographer of W. E. B. Du Bois

NPG on the Road

Exhibition opens at new women’s museum

NPG Schedules & Information

Portrait Puzzlers

Hollywood glitz

In the next issue

A special report from the North Carolina Museum of History in Raleigh: the opening of the traveling exhibition “A Brush with History” and the workshop for staff teams from participating venues.
Whose Life Is It Anyhow?

Marc Pachter
Director

When I was a doctoral student in American history at Harvard University in the late 1960s and early 1970s, I think it is fair to say that I was taught to despise biography as a form, or at least to condescend to it. In the intellectual mood that surrounded me, history was seen to have value as an overview of the broad currents and social forces of the day. Investigations of particular lives, on the other hand, were seen to be outmoded remnants of the nineteenth-century view that great men (and it was men that they had in mind) shaped the events of their time.

Now, while I shared the view, and still do, that it is impossible to understand history without seeing its broader currents, I instinctively rebelled at the position that biography was only a side eddy in the mighty stream of history. Individuals in all social frameworks do make a difference, and our ability to understand any other era, or even an important trend in our own era, is enhanced by seeing how one life experience reflects the world around us, through the prism of our own individual experience. One of the Portrait Gallery’s most famous commissioners, Barbara Tuchman, understood this instinctively and was embraced by a vast national readership as a result.

Biography as a form has a tradition of its own, and throughout its development, advocates have recognized that the assumptions and interests of biographers differ somewhat from those who follow other approaches to history. This difference goes very far back. If biography can be said to have a patron saint, it is the Greek Plutarch, who wrote in his Life of Alexander: “It must be borne in mind that my purpose is not to write histories, but lives. . . .”

Harry Truman by Greta Kempton; gift of friends of Harry Truman

Harry Truman by George Tames; gift of Frances O. Tames

Harry Truman by Paolo Garretto

Harry Truman by the Harris and Ewing Studio; gift of Aileen Conkey

If biography can be said to have a patron saint, it is the Greek Plutarch, who wrote in his Life of Alexander: “It must be borne in mind that my purpose is not to write histories, but lives. . . .”
assertion that what others dismiss as trivia—the day-to-day expression of personality, the accidental turnings of a life, the conscious and unconscious motives of human behavior—are important to know and critical to relate to future generations. These constitute, in fact, the “stuff” of life and are dismissed at the peril of constructing abstractions and theories about human experience that unintentionally lie about its true nature, its messy vitality.

But however historians and biographers may quarrel about what is important to record, there is no question that readers respond with tremendous interest to biography, particularly in our own time, which some call the Golden Age of Biography. When, a decade or so ago, the Library of Congress undertook a survey of American reading habits, it discovered that more Americans had read a biography in the last six months than any other genre, including mysteries, westerns, and other likely popular choices.

This is not necessarily an indication of an interest in fine reading. Not all biographies are created equal. Many are prurient, exploitative, or just plain destructive. Reading them does not necessarily represent an appeal to the higher side of human nature. But it would be a mistake to assume that they represent the bulk of readers’ choices. There are hundreds and hundreds of biographers at work today writing compelling stories that bring their subjects to life with the honest hope that they have understood them properly and successfully transmitted their humanity. Modern biographers, it is true, rarely write in the mode of hero-worship; that would be more true of the nineteenth-century style. But what they want to present to their readers are believable and compelling lives, lives that are more than statues. They are not publicity agents for a reputation but neither are they—those whom we respect as masters of their craft—simple iconoclasts.

Still, because biography has become a central genre of our day, it raises many issues that go to the heart of changing mores and boundaries. Are we to allow—not legally but morally—biographers to go wherever they want to in the discussion of a life? Are there boundaries of discretion, even in our increasingly indiscreet age? Where do these lie? Are we to know only the public side of individuals? And how aware do we want to be of the biographer in the telling of the life narrative? Edmund Morris drew the ire of many critics by placing himself firmly in the narrative he wrote of the life of Ronald Reagan. Did he go too far, or are we still not willing to admit how subjective is the telling of a life?

The controversies that rage around the question of modern biography provide testimony of our sense of its importance. We want to know more about other people, particularly people who have played a major role in our history or our lives. But what can we know about them? What should we know about them? And whom do we trust to tell their stories?

One phrase that is quietly disappearing says a lot about the current state of biography. It used to be said that such and such a biography was “definitive.” That meant that it was possible to conceive that there was one telling of a life that could be objective and complete, that the essence of the life was captured for all time, or at least for a generation. That assumption now seems naive. We know that every biographer brings strengths and weaknesses to the telling of another person’s life. We also know that great writing skills are as important as great research skills; and to that we might add a talent for empathy. It is a particular telling of a life that we pick up in the library or bookstore. When the right writer comes together with the right subject—as in the case of David McCullough and Harry Truman—we have pure gold. But it’s not definitive. There will be another Harry Truman to meet one day, through another biographer’s eyes. That does not suggest the limitations of biography, but its infinite possibilities.

. . . readers respond with tremendous interest to biography, particularly in our own time, which some call the Golden Age of Biography.
Then & NOW
The Public Life

Sidney Hart
Editor, Peale Family Papers

Readers of biography couldn’t help but be drawn into last year’s controversy surrounding the publication of Edmund Morris’s *Dutch: A Memoir of Ronald Reagan*, a work attacked from various viewpoints and disciplines. An article by Scott E. Casper on the history Web site “Common-Place” draws an interesting comparison between the reaction to Morris’s biography of a popular American President and that to Mason Locke Weems’s early-nineteenth-century biography, *The Life of George Washington; with curious anecdotes, equally honorable to himself, and exemplary to his young countrymen* (Philadelphia, 1808).

Both books were attacked by conservatives and liberals for their omissions and distortions. The more interesting criticism of both Morris and Weems, however, is not political, but literary, involving their basic approach to biography. Morris created fictional characters in his work, including an older version of himself who is able to view the young Ronald Reagan. It is only with the use of these fictional characters, Morris wrote, that he was able to overcome the difficulty of understanding “the massive privacy of his [Reagan’s] personality.” Weems also inserted himself into Washington’s life and invented whole episodes, most famously the cherry tree story. A critic in 1810 wondered whether to characterize the work as a biography or a novel.

Both Morris and Weems directed their books to a popular audience (although Morris also aimed to win over literary critics). While Weems created Washington as a hero to inspire young Americans, Morris’s characterization of Reagan is more ambivalent, perhaps a reflection of our current inability to believe in heroes. Both authors, however, share the viewpoint that has become quite dominant in recent decades, that the private life is more revealing and more important than the public life. Weems believed that a man’s character was revealed only away from public view. He did not scrutinize Washington’s private life to find faults or even minor foibles that would make him more accessible and human to the ordinary reader; however, but used it as a way to display (and create) a hero for a republican nation, very much along the lines that Benjamin Franklin constructed for himself in his autobiography. Weems’s Washington was a man whose private virtues were meant to be emulated by the youth of the nation, whose virtue, in turn, would be necessary to sustain the republic. For biography and history there is an inherent problem with relying on the private sphere to get at the true character of a subject. By its very nature, most private life is, except in rare instances, unknowable and unrecoverable for a biographer; we do not have much information of this type even from famous individuals. The temptation for the biographer is to then fictionalize the account.

A way to avoid the problem is to make the case that the public life is what matters. Richard Brookhiser’s 1996 biography of George Washington, *Founding Father*, makes that case. Brookhiser argues persuasively that Washington had a central role in the early republic. As commander-in-chief of the army during the Revolution, president of the Constitutional Convention, and our first President, Washington was pivotal in founding the republic. His public actions and pronouncements do reveal his character and his beliefs. Washington, as Brookhiser and almost all of those who have written about Washington have noted, did not make the biographer’s work easy. He was not a modern man in that he did not seek to display his feelings and emotions; instead, he worked hard to establish a certain distance from his contemporaries. Told by the wife of the British ambassador during his second term as President that she could tell his feelings by the expression on his face, Washing-
ton insisted that she was wrong, that “my countenance never yet betrayed my feelings.” And yet his public statements, such as his first Farewell Address and his Circular to the States, reveal deeply held beliefs regarding God, man, liberty, and responsibility—ideals of critical importance to the founding of the republic. The Address is a single paragraph of three sentences. Washington first sets out in two long sentences the glory of America at its onset: vast lands and resources, enlightened times and progress in the arts and sciences, and a free and liberal government, all “designated by Providence” for a blessed people. He concludes with a short third sentence, which strikingly evinces strong convictions regarding behavior and responsibility: “At this auspicious period, the United States came into existence as a Nation, and if their Citizens should not be completely free and happy, the fault will be entirely [sic] their own.” It was, as Brookhiser notes, a blunt warning to his countrymen (startling to us, but not to Washington’s contemporaries): If you fail with all these blessings, it will be your own fault. Washington knew that man failed often enough, which is why he concluded his address with the stern admonition, so alien to our ears, of a patriarch. When Washington’s important public actions and expressions are placed in the context of the considerable archive that we possess of his life, we obtain perhaps as complete a picture as possible of the man without resorting to imagination. The biographer is even able to use certain information from his subject’s private life that does have an important bearing on his public actions (e.g., Washington was an extremely good horseback rider). Brookhiser’s incisive analysis of Washington’s character reminds us that there is, certainly for many famous figures, sufficient material available to write biography and history without resorting to fiction.

Appearances Are Deceiving: Henry James

David C. Ward
Senior Associate Editor, Peale Family Papers
Which American novelist wrote, “Live all you can; it’s a mistake not to. It doesn’t so much matter what you do in particular so long as you have your life. If you haven’t had that what have you had?”:
(a) Ernest Hemingway (b) Henry James (c) Erica Jong (d) Thomas Wolfe? Despite (a), (c), and (d)’s well-known narcissisms, it was in fact Henry James who, despite his stereotyped reputation as a Brahmin stuffed shirt, wrote this paean to individual self-fulfillment. James’s bejeweled and difficult style makes it easy to typecast him as the intellectual mandarin par excellence, a writer whose only interest is the workings of a small coterie of the transatlantic rich—a writer easily dismissed, by those who have not read him, as precious. In fact, James’s writings consistently grapple with the great American theme of the tension between what the historian John Higham has called “boundlessness and consolidation,” manifested by the continual conflict between individual self-assertion and the constraints of an indifferent or hostile society. James raises the stakes by adding a third dimension to this conflict. He never stacks the deck, as a second-rate novelist would, by making “society” and its representatives into a straw man easily defeated by his hero or heroine. James’s deeply textured, not to say labyrinthian, style derives from his artistic sense of the deep structures on which societies are based and how those structures control or influence human actions. In the plaintive note to live one’s life is the foreknowledge that such efforts are always likely to end in disappointment or tragedy. The accretions of the past are always present in James, and it is no surprise that he was a master at ghost stories and psychological suspense, in which a haunting from the past becomes immanent.

A brilliant guide to James’s life and work is Leon Edel’s magnificent Henry James: A Life, originally published in four volumes and now usefully condensed into one (New York: Harper and Row, 1985). One of the reasons for literary biography is that no one, aside from scholars, really believes in formalist analysis. The work of literary or pictorial art is never entirely self-referential, but a complex intersection of history and biography. So the deep writings of James require the mining of a biographer like Edel to chart the life of the mind and the expression of that mind on the page. In a dot-com world in which speed substitutes for depth, Edel’s James reminds us of the pleasures of complexity. Moreover, it reminds us, in our post-postmodernist daze, that biography has a subject and that subject is not the biographer.

The National Portrait Gallery has two small portraits of James by Ellen Emmet Rand. They depict James in his familiar pose of bluff imperviousness. But the story has a deliciously Jamesian kicker, one that reminds us of his central lesson: the world is deeply layered, and our ability to perceive (let alone comprehend) that world is necessarily limited. Leon Edel acquired the portrait (mark the singular!) of James, but when he unframed it, he discovered a second portrait hidden underneath. (The “second” portrait shows a looser, more relaxed, less formal James, which may be the reason why it was hidden.) Can there have been a more apposite image for the biographer than finding that hidden James? Yet could there be still another mysterious—Jamesian—layer to the story? James had owned the portrait, which was painted by his cousin during the summer of 1900, while he was writing The Ambassadors, the source for the opening quotation. Did James layer them himself, hiding one James from another, leaving a mystery for posterity to solve?

Leon Edel by Louis Muhlstock, 1931
Henry James by Ellen Emmet Rand, 1900
Henry James by Ellen Emmet Rand, 1900

All three portraits are the gift of Marjorie Edel in memory of Leon Edel.
Ellen G. Miles  
CURATOR OF PAINTING AND SCULPTURE  
While walking through the National Portrait Gallery before it closed last January, I often found myself face to face with George Washington—that is, Washington in Gilbert Stuart’s remarkable second life study, known as the Athenaum portrait. When Washington was painted by Stuart in Philadelphia in 1796, he was sixty-four and nearing the end of his second term of office as President. He had been painted numerous times before. Other artists had rendered his broad forehead, blue eyes, Roman nose, thin mouth, and tapered chin with enough variety to make one unsure of exactly what Washington really looked like. While many of these images are memorable, Stuart’s second life portrait (he painted an earlier one in 1795) has become the best known. Much admired by Washington’s contemporaries and in the nineteenth century, when it was first reproduced on American currency, this portrait has had wider circulation more recently. In 1932 more than a million color reproductions of it were distributed as part of the bicentennial celebrations of Washington’s birth. Recently the engraved image, which appears in reverse on the one-dollar bill, has become more familiar as the animated Washington in television advertisements for the new one-dollar coin.

The life portrait itself was left unfinished. Only the head, with its powdered hair, and the suggestions of white shirt and black coat are completed. Around the head is an area of dark color, which provided a contrast to the lighter tones of the face and hair during the actual painting process. This area would have been completed later as part of the background, had Stuart finished the portrait. But he realized the value of keeping the life image as fresh as possible. What mattered was the face, revealing—it was believed—the character and personality of the sitter; the rest of the portrait could be painted from the imagination.

Staring at Washington’s portrait doesn’t always yield a sense of the man himself. Washington’s diaries and letters are more revealing. A close look at Stuart’s work makes one very alert to his way of delineating a face: his use of broad brushes of color, touched with details in light brown, and his placement of these colors side by side—whites, ivories, pinks next to each other, or to darker hues of red or brown. Stuart learned to paint in England and brought back to the United States the manner of painting favored by late eighteenth-century British portraitists. Consequently, he did not blend his colors as much as many of his American contemporaries did. The portraits were meant to be viewed at some distance, and they maintained a liveliness precisely because the brushwork was not smoothly blended.

Stuart painted many additional portraits of Washington by copying this life portrait, promising that he would deliver the original when he had completed it. In fact, according to some of his contemporaries, the sittings for the portrait had been arranged with the understanding that the painting would eventually go to Mount Vernon. Even after Washington’s death in 1799, Stuart failed to deliver the painting. He also kept the incomplete life study of Martha Washington, painted at the same time. The two portraits remained in Stuart’s studio and were acquired by the Boston Athenaeum after the artist’s death in 1828. The National Portrait Gallery and the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, purchased them jointly from the Athenaeum in 1980, and the paintings alternate between the museums every three years. Thus, one purpose of staring closely at the portrait was to store away in my memory its brushstrokes and colors as a visual reference for use during the period when the portraits would be on view in Boston rather than in Washington. This closer look also put me temporarily in the role of the artist as he painted Washington, and therefore in the ersatz presence of the President.

Further reading: Ellen G. Miles, George and Martha Washington: Portraits from the Presidential Years (Charlottesville, Va., 1999).
NPG Hosts Panel with Roger Mudd on Presidential Campaigning

On October 5, two days after Al Gore and George W. Bush had their first televised debate of last fall’s presidential campaign, the National Portrait Gallery made its own contribution to election year 2000. The occasion was the opening of the Gallery’s traveling exhibition of presidential portraits at the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum on the campus of Texas A&M University. To mark the event, the Gallery assembled a panel of commentators to offer their thoughts on the state of presidential electioneering—both past and present. Moderated by the award-winning television newsman Roger Mudd, one of the Gallery’s commissioners, the group consisted of former Ronald Reagan adviser Michael Deaver, political journalist and author Haynes Johnson, and nineteenth-century historian and biographer Robert Remini. The panel was generously supported by the Paul Peck Fund for Presidential Studies. Both Paul and Suzanne Peck were able to join us for the event.

The hour-long discussion, before a capacity audience of more than six hundred people, covered an array of topics, from the influence of political commercials to the value of televised debates and the significance of vice-presidential candidates. As the panelists’ focus moved back and forth between campaigns past and present, the truth of the adage, “The more things change, the more they are the same,” became readily apparent. “Spin doctor,” for example, may be a relatively new term, but as Remini pointed out, the spin doctors’ presence in presidential elections dates back to the days of Andrew Jackson. And for that matter, so does digging up old dirt in the name of casting doubt on a candidate’s White House worthiness.

Because this is the first time that the Gallery’s presidential collection has left Washington, publicity surrounding the “Portraits of the Presidents” exhibition was extensive. Packing of the sixty-one portraits proved to be of particular interest and was broadcast by television stations around the country, including “CBS Sunday Morning.” Attendance at the George Bush Presidential Library and Museum has doubled since the show opened there.

The portraits in the exhibition range from an Indian peace medal of John Quincy Adams, to a life mask of Abraham Lincoln, to a larger-than-life black-and-white profile of President Clinton by Chuck Close. An audio guide, narrated by National Public Radio’s Scott Simon and including presidential speeches and interviews with presidential portraitists, was produced to accompany the exhibition.

“Portraits of the Presidents” gets national attention
When the occupants and art collections move out of the Old Patent Office Building, the first phase of the renovation will begin, consisting of the demolition and removal of all mechanical, electrical, telecommunications, plumbing, security, fire alarm and fire protection systems, as well as elevators and lifts. Most of the building systems have been in place for thirty-five years and are obsolete. Selective demolition of structural and architectural work is required to complete the removal of the building systems. The floors will be removed to access concealed trenches, which carry piping, ductwork, and electrical conduit. The walls will be cut open to remove ductwork and conduit, and the ceilings will be cut to remove conduit and lighting components. Original and historic materials, such as the marble floors of the south wing, will be repaired, cleaned, and stored for reinstallation.

Because the building and its contents are considered cultural resources, they are protected under the National Historic Preservation Act and the Smithsonian Institution Policy on Historic Preservation. The building is a designated National Historic Landmark property and is listed on the National Register of Historic Places. Because of the immense historic and cultural value of the Old Patent Office Building, “salvage and storage” is a large part of this project. Many historic elements will be removed from their locations in the building, repaired or reconditioned, and stored until they can be reinstalled. Historic items include cast-iron and bronze handrails, cast-iron stairways, decorative chandeliers, sconces and other light fixtures, marble floor tiles, and the hand-made clay tile floor of the Great Hall. The Smithsonian requires a rigorous screening procedure to ensure that the contractor chosen for “salvage and storage” work is qualified in the areas of historic preservation, historic masonry removal and installation, historic handmade tile removal, and historic glass removal.

The contractor’s work is strictly controlled by the construction documents, to ensure the protection of the entire building during the demolition phase. Specific guidelines govern every aspect of the contractor’s actions, from parking, materials storage, and job-site safety plans, to meticulous photo- and video-documentation and protection of building features that will remain in place during demolition.

In 1964, a similar building-wide renovation occurred. Contractors removed obsolete systems and installed new ones. The photographs here show the walls, ceilings, and floors cut open for the removal of pipes, ductwork, and electrical conduit. The work slated to begin in 2001 entails the removal of those now-obsolete building systems. When the demolition phase is complete, all of the floors, walls, and ceilings will have been prepared for the next phase of work: the installation of new systems. At the completion of the entire renovation project, the interiors will be repaired and refurnished, leaving the architecture unspoiled, yet also leaving the building with state-of-the-art systems that will last for the next thirty to fifty years.
On Writing Biography

An interview with distinguished scholar David Levering Lewis, Martin Luther King Jr. University Professor at Rutgers University and a commissioner of the National Portrait Gallery, by Carolyn Kinder Carr, deputy director and chief curator.

Carolyn Carr: What prompted you to write a biography of William Edward Burghardt Du Bois?

David Levering Lewis: Several decades ago, while writing When Harlem Was in Vogue, I became aware of the letters, essays, and memorabilia of Du Bois (1868–1963). He wrote elegantly and eloquently, and his work touched on numerous streams in American political and cultural life. Intuitively, I knew that there was a story there. As I became increasingly interested in him, I quickly discovered that little work had been done on his life. Two academic biographies existed, but these contained incomplete information, as the authors did not have access to Du Bois’s papers. Herbert Aptheker, a leading Communist historian as well as the guardian of Du Bois’s papers, had compiled both his published and unpublished essays and addresses, but this work, while important to the history of Du Bois’s intellectual and ideological development, still left his life relatively unexamined. I was fortunate that in 1973 the second Mrs. Du Bois, Shirley Graham-Du Bois, sold his papers to the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. When they were finally catalogued in 1983, I was the first in line to use them. I think other scholars interested in this area of American history were unaware that they had become available.

Beginning about 1985 and for the next two years, I installed myself in the Berkshires during holidays and summers, examining more than 120,000 items in the Du Bois papers. I was not disappointed with what I discovered. Every box was loaded with something interesting. When I began to write in 1990, I initially envisioned a single volume, but the wealth of material seemed to warrant a two-part series.

Carr: How did you manage this rich resource of information?

Lewis: While working in the Du Bois collection and in the various other libraries that had papers related to him, I made notebooks of the major documents I wished to reference. In all, I assembled twenty-six notebooks of about two hundred pages each, arranged chronologically. I then created a master list to follow as I developed my narrative in both volumes.

I finished volume one [nearly six hundred pages, plus notes] in about eighteen months. As every writer knows, when you write, you sit for a long time. You resist the temptation to go outside. Self-imposed solitude is the trick. The second volume took longer—there seemed to be more academic interruptions and responsibilities. I began working on it in 1995, but I did not finish it until spring of 2000. I write in longhand; I consider the computer a television set with a keyboard.

Carr: Was there a difference in your approach to Du Bois’s life between volume one and volume two?
Lewis: In the second volume, there were far more things to think about from the point of view of the biographer—far more traps. Some of the positions that Du Bois took will be a mystery to many. Beginning in the 1930s, he assumed increasingly leftist views, and in the end, he became a strong champion of Communism. He was not only profoundly critical of America, but he frequently spoke up in favor of totalitarianism. Ultimately, the United States revoked his passport, and he lived his final years in Ghana. I felt a strong need to place his views in context—to do more than just let him speak for himself, as I had more or less done in volume one. I also felt the need to quote extensively from others to show that there was an intense dialogue in the African American community, and that not all African Americans agreed with his positions regarding issues such as the sources and solutions for racial conflict and racial equality in America. It is ironic, of course, that this man, who had so early and often championed justice for African Americans, left America just as the civil rights movement was getting into high gear.

Carr: In addition to the written documents, you also undertook numerous interviews for both volumes.

Lewis: Yes, I have approximately two hundred transcribed interviews. Many of my interviews for volume two focused on what remained of the genuine left wing. I also interviewed many of the women whom Du Bois knew rather intimately. Du Bois was a proper Victorian moralist, and with his first wife, he certainly kept up the appearance of a proper married man. But he enjoyed the company of bright, capable, assertive women. One of the things that I noticed with the interviews were the gender discrepancies in the responses. Women were much more likely to speak kindly of him, often in glowing terms. I think, in part, this is because he so openly admired their intellectual abilities and professional accomplishments. Men were much more critical and some were openly hostile. He could be a difficult man.

Carr: What did you learn about your subject that you had not anticipated?

Lewis: In the beginning, I did not fully appreciate what an extraordinary figure Du Bois was. I was also taken with the exactitude with which he organized his life. He got up in the morning, had a cup of coffee and a cigarette, and then began his correspondence. About mid-morning, he began to write his public pieces. He had his lunch and then resumed writing for an hour or two. He then read fiction until 5:00 p.m., at which time he stopped for dinner and entertainment. About 9:00 p.m., he had a cigarette and a brandy. He never went to bed later than 10:00 p.m. He mapped out on a scroll what he was going to do for the next month, and he stuck to his program absolutely. It was a performance to behold.

In many ways, the older Du Bois became, the more alert, versatile, and alive he was. At ninety, as soon as he reached Ghana, he wrote an appreciation of the country. It was only his surgery in 1962 that finally slowed him down.
In 1996, Cathy Bonner, president of the board of the Foundation for Women’s Resources, began discussing the possibility of creating a museum where the stories of American women could be told “in their voices, through their eyes.” Four years later—an unprecedented speed in the museum world—The Women’s Museum: An Institute for the Future, a comprehensive national institution dedicated to the accomplishments of American women, opened its doors.

Located in a restored 1910 Art Deco building in Dallas’s Fair Park, this state-of-the-art interactive facility fits perfectly into that theme. Through the use of computers, cellular-phone audio guides, multi-screen high-definition televisions, and cyberspace connections, the stories of more than three thousand women are told in such exhibitions as “Leaders and Innovators in Business and Technology,” “Mothers of Invention,” “Milestones in American Women’s History,” “Funny Women,” and “Sports and Adventure.”

As a member of the Smithsonian Affiliation Program, The Women’s Museum was able to draw extensively on the collections of the Institution. When Bonner and her staff learned about the closing of the National Portrait Gallery building for renovation, the possibility of creating an exhibition drawn from our collection came to mind. Many of the Gallery’s portraits of women were destined for storage, and we were delighted at the opportunity to have them exhibited instead. In July, fifty works of art—including life-sized portraits of Ethel Merman and Marian Anderson, as well as bronze busts of Susan B. Anthony and Rosa Parks—were shipped to Texas. “Notable Women from the National Portrait Gallery” thus became part of the inaugural exhibitions of the new museum. It will remain there for the next three years.

Dallas, Texas
The Women’s Museum:
An Institute for the Future*

Arlington, Texas
Legends of the Game Museum*

Twelve works, including a watercolor of Vida Blue, a casein painting of Mickey Mantle and Roger Maris, and a polychromed bronze of Casey Stengel, will remain on view until January 2003.

Washington, D.C.
MCI National Sports Gallery
Photographic images of seventeen “Champions of American Sport,” including such noted figures as Jack Dempsey, Althea Gibson, Jackie Robinson, Dorothy Hamill, “Babe” Didrikson, and Jackie Joyner-Kersee, among other athletes from football, baseball, hockey, track, swimming, tennis, racing, and boxing will be installed in late January 2001.

Washington, D.C.
The Smithsonian Castle,
Schmermer Hall

“In Indian Peace Medals from the Schermer Collection, National Portrait Gallery.” This collection of eighteen U.S. peace medals and one British medal, along with a rare volume of Thomas McKenney and James Hall’s book The History of the Indian Tribes of North America, will be on display from January 26 through June 3, 2001. This exhibition is made possible through the generous gift of Betty and Lloyd Schermer.

Naples, Florida
Philharmonic Center
for the Arts

“For Hans Namuth: Portraits.” The first full exploration of Namuth’s life and work, seventy-five photographs will be on view through January 14, 2001. The exhibition will travel to France in the fall.

Richmond, Virginia
The Virginia Historical Society
Thirty-three paintings, sculptures, prints, drawings, and photographs of important Virginians, including Arthur Ashe, Henry “Light-Horse Harry” Lee, Ella Fitzgerald, Robert E. Lee, and Martha Washington are on view through January 2003.
Portraits of the Presidents

George Bush Presidential Library and Museum, College Station, Texas

Harry S. Truman Library Independence, Missouri
March 1–May 20, 2001

Gerald R. Ford Presidential Museum, Grand Rapids, Michigan
June 22–Sept. 23, 2001

Ronald Reagan Presidential Library and Museum, Simi Valley, California

Memphis Brooks Museum of Art, Memphis, Tennessee
Feb. 22–May 19, 2002

North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh
June 21–Sept. 15, 2002

Virginia Historical Society, Richmond

Modern American Portrait Drawings

Amon Carter Museum, Fort Worth, Texas
May 25–Aug. 25, 2002

Elmhurst Art Museum, Illinois

Women of Our Time

Old State House, Hartford, Connecticut
Sept. 13–Nov. 11, 2002

A Brush with History

North Carolina Museum of History, Raleigh
Jan. 27–April 8, 2001

Tennessee State Museum, Nashville
May 4–July 1, 2001

The National Museum of Western Art, Tokyo, Japan
Aug. 6–Oct. 14, 2001

The Speed Art Museum, Louisville, Kentucky
Nov. 20, 2001–Jan. 27, 2002

Montgomery Museum of Fine Arts, Alabama
Feb. 23–May 5, 2002

New Orleans Museum of Art, Louisiana
May 31–Aug. 11, 2002


Useful Contacts

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We are tentatively scheduled to move to our new location in the Victor Building in the spring. New contact information will be posted on our Web site and in Profile.

CAP and Library Open
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Chief Justice John Marshall, author of the first scholarly biography of George Washington; by Albert Newsam, 1831

Information 15
Portrait Puzzlers:
Biographical Glitz: Lives Scripted in Hollywood

Using these clues, can you connect names to these faces? Answers below.

1. Thomas Edison (1847–1931), oil on canvas by Abraham Anderson, circa 1890 (detail). Rooney played this inventor of, among other things, the moving picture, in Young Tom Edison (1940).

2. John Reed (1887–1920), gelatin silver print by Pirie MacDonald, circa 1916 (detail). Beatty played him in Reds (1981) and won an Oscar for also directing the film.

3. Pocahontas (c. 1595–1617), oil on canvas by an unidentified artist, after 1616 (detail). Transfer from the National Gallery of Art; gift of Andrew W. Mellon. The daughter of a Powhatan chief, she eventually went to England as the wife of an English settler from the Jamestown, Virginia.


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