

FREDERICK HUNTINGTON DOUGLAS

1897-1956

To assemble the facts pertaining to the life and work of Frederick H. Douglas is a relatively simple matter. To attempt to tell of the multifaceted personality whom hundreds knew and loved under the name "Eric" is a formidable task. No one person can do justice to it; selecting 10 friends at random, 10 entirely different facets might be illuminated.

The facts can be summarized briefly. Eric was born in Evergreen, Colorado, on October 29, 1897. He was the son of Charles Winfred and Mary Josepha (Williams) Douglas. Various childhood influences were to be strongly reflected in his later life. At an early age he accompanied his parents on trips into the Southwest and began to develop his lifelong interest in the Indians and their art. His father, a Canon in the Episcopal Church, was a well known musicologist and organist who adapted Gregorian chants for use in the Anglican Church and composed hymns, and his mother was a talented pianist. Devotion to the Church and a profound love of music, which found expression in the playing of the piano and the organ and the collecting of fine recordings, characterized Eric's whole life.

After a brief period as a private in the Infantry in 1918, Eric was graduated from the University of Colorado in 1921. From 1921 until 1926 he did postgraduate work at the University of Michigan and the Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts. In 1926 he married Freda Bendix Gillespie. She and 3 children, David, Ann Pauline (Mrs. John A. Maher), Eve (Mrs. Wallace Jolivet), and 4 grandchildren survive him. From 1926 until 1929 Eric's primary concern was with painting and wood carving, and, in 1928, accompanied by his wife, he embarked on a trip around the world, painting in each country that he visited. During this period he began some of the collections to which he was to devote so much of his time in the ensuing years. One of his major hobbies was the collection of Japanese prints. He also collected outstanding examples of Balinese wood carvings, textiles, both Oriental and Early American, and rare books, as well as many examples of American Indian arts and crafts.

In 1929 Eric joined the staff of the Denver Art Museum and until the time of his death he continued to be associated with this institution to which he willed most of his collections and the bulk of his magnificent anthropological library. The section of the library dealing with sex was given to the Institute For Sex Research at Indiana University and certain dictionaries and books on philology were given to the Denver Public Library. In 1940 Eric became the Director of the Denver Art Museum, but his interests did not lie in the administrative field and, after 2 years, he decided to devote his time to the study of material culture, the collecting of native art, and the development of new museum techniques. Until 1947 his title was Curator of Indian Arts; after that date he became Curator of Native Arts. He also served as Commissioner of the Federal Arts and Crafts Board and as a trustee of various museums. Not only through his own work, but through the help and counsel that he gave so generously to others, he made major contributions to anthropology and museology.

Among Eric's outstanding achievements in the field of exhibition were the planning and installation, in cooperation with René d'Harnoncourt and Henry Clumb, of the Federal Government Exhibit at the San Francisco World's Fair and the similar exhibit at the Museum of Modern Art, which were landmarks in the field of museum display. He also performed an important service in reorganizing collections and exhibits at the Peabody Museum, Harvard University. Through publications, notably the material culture notes issued through the Denver Art Museum, and the important book, *Indian Art In The United States*, which he published with René d'Harnoncourt, he reached a still wider audience. As a lecturer at Harvard University, the University of Colorado, and the University of Denver, he stimulated and influenced many anthropological students. To thousands of people he brought a new concept of the American Indian through his Indian Style Show, which he presented more than one hundred times in various parts of the country. Beautiful examples of aboriginal clothing from the Denver Art Museum collections were modeled by local girls while Eric provided a running commentary on the dresses and the cultures which produced them.

From 1942 until 1944 Eric served in the United States Army in the New Hebrides and on Luzon, first as a Captain and later as a Major. He was discharged with the rank of Lieutenant Colonel. As registrar of the 31st General Hospital Unit he was the commanding officer of 130 nurses whom he welded into a group with an *esprit de corps* that the Marine Corps might have envied. After the war the unity of the group was amazingly preserved by a round robin of letters, which reached the dimensions of a book, and by yearly reunions in various parts of the country. Every 2 years there was a national reunion. Sixty-four members of the group attended the gathering held at Troutdale, Colorado, 2 years before Eric's death.

It was during his service in the South Pacific that Eric began to write poetry. The manner in which he wrote his poems, predominantly sonnets with a markedly Elizabethan quality, was something that neither he nor anyone else could fully understand or explain. They came to him full blown, perfect in form, and were written in a matter of moments with none of the work or effort usually involved in the production of poems in this demanding verse form. He published them in 5 volumes under the revealing title, "The Inner Light."

With tremendous courage Eric continued his work despite the amputation of his left arm, intolerable pain, and the knowledge of imminent death from cancer. During the last summer of his life he prepared 10 material culture notes for publication in the Denver Art Museum Series and on every day when it was possible he worked on the Museum collections. Only 2 months before his death, which occurred on April 23, 1956, he went to Berkeley to serve as a consultant in the planning of the building and the exhibits for the University of California Anthropological Museum.

Few people have had so profound an influence on the museum world and Eric received many honors. He was awarded the degree of Doctor of Science by the University of Colorado in 1948 and shortly before his death the Regents of the University presented him with the recognition medal which is given at infrequent intervals to citizens who have made great contributions to the cultural development of the state. In 1946 he was one of the 10 museum men invited by the Swedish Museums Association, under the sponsorship of the Swedish Government, to tour the museums of the country. In February, 1956, he was named honorary Curator of the American Indian section of the Nelson Rockefeller Museum of Native Arts in New York. His tremendous ability and the magnitude of his accomplishments brought recognition in many other forms. Eric's greatest memorial, however, lies in the hearts of those who knew and loved him.

H. MARIE WORMINGTON