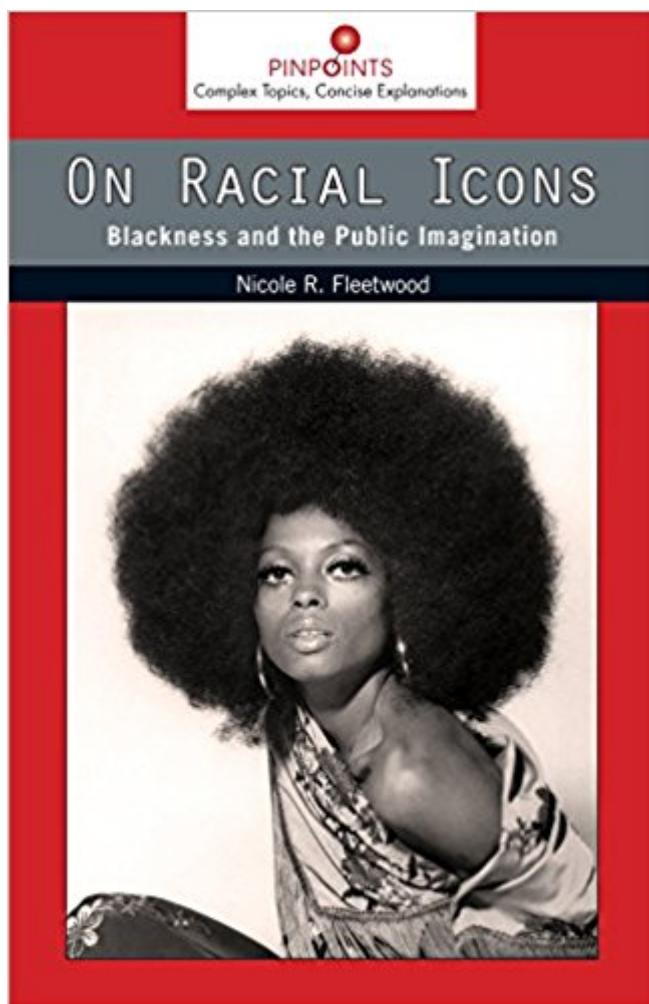


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# On Racial Icons: Blackness And The Public Imagination (Pinpoints)



## Synopsis

What meaning does the American public attach to images of key black political, social, and cultural figures? Considering photography's role as a means of documenting historical progress, what is the representational currency of these images? How do racial icons signify? Nicole R. Fleetwood's answers to these questions will change the way you think about the next photograph that you see depicting a racial event, black celebrity, or public figure. In *On Racial Icons*, Fleetwood focuses a sustained look on photography in documenting black public life, exploring the ways in which iconic images function as celebrations of national and racial progress at times or as a gauge of collective racial wounds in moments of crisis. Offering an overview of photography's ability to capture shifting race relations, Fleetwood spotlights in each chapter a different set of iconic images in key sectors of public life. She considers flash points of racialized violence in photographs of Trayvon Martin and Emmett Till; the political, aesthetic, and cultural shifts marked by the rise of pop stars such as Diana Ross; and the power and precarity of such black sports icons as Serena Williams and LeBron James; and she does not miss Barack Obama and his family along the way. *On Racial Icons* is an eye-opener in every sense of the phrase. Images from the book.

(<http://rutgerspress.rutgers.edu/pages/Fleetwood.aspx>)

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

"Nicole Fleetwood's astute study makes transparent the power of images and strengthens our

understanding as to how significant black figures transformed our imaginary as a fixed construction based on media perceptions. An impressive read!" (Deborah Willis New York University) Nicole R. Fleetwood calls her latest book "an act of love." But readers may end up referring to it as tough love as Fleetwood offers a searing investigation into America's fixation on black images from President Obama to a living legend of tennis, Serena Williams. With the author's definition of racial icons as "an idolized image or figure, that is simultaneously shrouded in the legacies of U.S. racism and its devaluing of black life," the book aims to unpack the multiple implications of black images both seen and unseen. < Read the interview at: <http://huff.to/1hvYVwM> > (Peter 'Souleo' Wright Huffington Post)"With *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination*, Nicole Fleetwood examines the emotional work and cultural meanings of black icons especially the place of veneration, condescension, celebrity, and commodification in the production of photographic images of Barack Obama, Diana Ross, Trayvon Martin, Serena Williams, and LeBron James. Accessible and concise, yet sensitive and insightful, Fleetwood invites us to dwell in the spaces where black iconic images circulate, to feel the hopes they gather, to understand the conflicts they engender, and above all to appreciate the implications they suggest for how we see ourselves." (Herman Gray University of California, Santa Cruz)

NICOLE R. FLEETWOOD is the director of the Institute for Research on Women and an associate professor of American Studies at Rutgers University. She specializes in visual culture and media studies, black cultural studies, and gender theory. She is the author of the award-winning book *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness.*Â

Yet again Nicole Fleetwood offers a compelling and undoubtedly adroit analysis of the junctures of U.S. visual culture and discourses of Blackness. Though the book is compact, it is packed with depth and complexity. For example, Fleetwood lingers in the more difficult moments--those rife with affective energies--when she discusses the complex ways in which Trayvon Martin's death (at the hands of George Zimmerman) has become iconic in U.S. visual culture. Moreover, the book asks us to think systematically and critically about visual culture, blackness, and American public culture vis-a-vis a host of figures (i.e., Diana Ross, Serena Williams, LeBron James, etc). Throughout the text, Fleetwood is interested in the question of: "how do racial iconic images become part of the story that Americans tell each other and the world about the unfolding of nation and the possibility of democracy"? This question is key, especially in our current public milieu, because it calls into question the very complicated notion of "democracy" and, in so doing, asks us to consider those

bodies living in a state of vulnerable democracy. Ultimately, the book is very thought-provoking and written with clarity so that various audiences could read and understand some of the ideas and issues Fleetwood is grappling with it. Read it!

My niece wrote this. Intelligent Professor, smart Lady.

Such incredible depth in analyzing the concept. I've recommended the book to several people for a perceptive view.

I loved this book-so precise and clear. Whether you are an expert on this topic or a novice, Fleetwood describes complex ideas in an interesting and easy to follow fashion. Usually, I really struggle to read books that offer such depth on the go as I usually get distracted. However, as I read this book on the subway, it enhanced my experience of reading as I saw a young black boy in a hooded sweatshirt and was contemplating the Trayvon Martin chapter, for example. Even as I write this in a local Brooklyn coffee shop, I can't help but listen to "Stop In the Name of Love" and think that the song has so much more meaning to me as I remember the chapter on Diana Ross and think of her as an icon and again as an natural woman - without the songs, photographs, wigs and costumes.

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