

PICTURES AND PROGRESS

EARLY PHOTOGRAPHY AND THE MAKING
OF AFRICAN AMERICAN IDENTITY

Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, editors





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Edited by Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith

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INTRODUCTION

Pictures and Progress

Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith

No other means of representing human likeness has been used more systematically to describe and formulate American identity than photography. Envisioning and exhibiting the American self has been a photographic venture since the inception of the medium. It is an ongoing social, cultural, and political project.

—Coco Fusco, “Racial Time, Racial Marks, Racial Metaphors”

Perhaps only now, at the dawn of our digital age, with our witness to the dramatic transformations wrought by this revolution still ongoing, has the comparable impact of photography’s magic on the nineteenth century begun to be fully appreciated. With the mechanical and electronic reproduction of images in the modern mass media animating so much of our cultural lives and prepossessing so much scholarly thought, serious attention cannot but return to the material beginnings of our visual dispensation. Today, owing to historians, cultural critics, and theorists as vital to the study of early photographic practices as Alan Trachtenberg, Laura Wexler, Deborah Willis, Allan Sekula, and the late Susan Sontag,¹ what Walter Benjamin portrayed as “the fog which obscures the beginnings of photography” seems, at last, to be dissipating.² The signal importance of photography’s advent to modernity’s hold on history is now clearly in view.

To be sure, photography was a watershed invention. So profound was the influence of photography upon antebellum and postbellum American life and thought that, like today’s digital technology, early photog-

raphy shifted the very ground upon which the production and circulation of knowledges, scientific and philosophical, had set only a half century earlier. With the discovery of the daguerreotype in 1839, a phenomenologically photographic species of vision was materialized and the foundations of our modern structure of perception were irrevocably constituted. “A marked revision occurred in all standards of visual knowledge,” the French poet and philosopher Paul Valéry wrote, and “man’s way of seeing began to change, and even his way of living felt the repercussions of the novelty, which immediately passed from the laboratory into everyday use, creating new needs and hitherto unimagined customs.”³ In the United States, in particular, where photography’s flourishing went unparalleled, photographic technology radically altered the ways Americans viewed themselves as subjects and citizens.

It was no coincidence, then, that early photography was implicated in certain important shifts in nineteenth-century American social and material relations. The deep impact of war, emancipation, mechanization, expansionism, and late-century immigration on American social life and identity was in no small way secured by the aid of early photography and its rapid advance over the century. More subtly, photography helped advance a readjustment of racial ideas and identities that had prevailed up to and, often, inside of these major shifts and transformations. The ill-conceived notion that the American Civil War was “a white man’s war,” for instance, was not just debated in lecture halls, magazines, and newspapers. It was opposed visually—pictorially contested, that is—in daguerreotypes, tintypes, and cartes de visite appearing in abolitionist organs and circulated among black soldiers, their kin, and communities. Studio portraits documenting the freedom dreams of the newly emancipated, landscapes challenging the frontier myth of unpeopled virgin plains, and the popular press pictures of eleven million European immigrants in the closing decades of the century were all not only preserved in the colonial archive by the documentary utility of photography but also helped give force to photography’s increasingly talismanic, proleptic power over the cultural course of a nation convulsing with change.

Among these changes, perhaps none was so momentous to the early co-production of photographic vision and American national identity as the event W. E. B. Du Bois described as “the sudden freeing of . . . black folk in the Nineteenth Century, and the attempt, through them, to reconstruct the basis of American democracy.”⁴ Evolving contemporaneously with this near-seismic shift in the demography and meaning of free persons, photog-

raphy helped to adjudicate the meaning of freedom, picturing its African American subjects from the day of the daguerreotype to that of the silver print. But more than that, the technologies of photographic vision and the cultural meaning of photographs were themselves advanced, if asymmetrically, by the very question of freedom, racial and otherwise, that emancipation de-philosophized. “Photography was most certainly used to portray this period,” as Jackie Napoleon Wilson has written.⁵ It was there “to justify, explain, and record” the truth and consequences of slavery and freedom. But just as certainly, photography emerged not out of a social or material vacuum but out of the world slavery made and, according to Nicholas Mirzoeff, “the violent interplay of cultures and peoples from Africa, Europe, and the Americas.”⁶ The photographs thus did much more than simply reflect in substance and shadow the wider social, political, and material calculus of the Atlantic world. They conditioned a modern way of seeing, physically conveying the new visual code in their material circulation between persons and places as if themselves in search of an ideal philosophy and form. This edited volume explores both the early history of photography in African American cultural and political life and the dialectical bearing of photographic vision on the wider logic of nineteenth-century racial thought.



The brisk commercialization of the daguerreotype in 1839, and the *carte de visite* in 1861, wrought vast changes in the performance of identities and the circulation of racial knowledges. Photography not only revolutionized visual representation but made it available to those previously cut off from its more bourgeois expressions in painting and sculpture, and Americans of all stripes were swept up by the democratizing promise of the new technology. *Pictures and Progress* examines the ways in which African American men and women variously used this new technology of representation to perform identities and to shape a dynamic visual culture.

In recent years scholars have rightly problematized and complicated the democratizing tendency often claimed for photography. They have demonstrated how quickly the new technology was harnessed to repressive forms of knowledge and systems of surveillance, how enthusiastically early race scientists adopted it to survey and catalog people into new categories of “types.”⁷ This important work gives us pause and shapes our

re-examination of photography's democratizing promise. Nevertheless, we suggest that something vital has been overlooked in the effort to delineate photography's repressive functions. Today we know more about Louis Agassiz's dehumanizing scientific daguerreotypes of enslaved African Americans than we do about early African American photographers and the African American men and women who commissioned daguerreotype, tintype, carte de visite, and cabinet card portraits, collected stereocards, or made their own tourist snapshots and assembled them in albums. We know more about the imagery of racism than we do about what African American men and women did when they took photography into their own hands. In part, this edited volume aims to recover the various ways in which nineteenth- and early twentieth-century African Americans viewed, conceptualized, and most importantly *used* the new technology of photography to chart and change and enjoy new social positions and political identities.

Building upon the groundbreaking scholarship of Deborah Willis, who has brought to light the work of many early African American photographers and has collected reflections on the role of photography in black life from contemporary African American writers, this book explores how prominent African American intellectuals, authors, orators, and activists understood, responded to, and utilized photography to create new spaces for self and community in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.⁸ *Pictures and Progress* reconsiders such famous figures as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, Ida B. Wells, Harriet Jacobs, Paul Laurence Dunbar, Louisa Picquet, W. E. B. Du Bois, and Booker T. Washington as important theorists and *practitioners* of photography. Although they might never have focused the lens or released the shutter on a camera, they put photographs to striking use in their varied quests for social and political justice, plumbing and expanding the political power of the photograph. While these men and women may not have been photographers, it is fair to say that they *practiced* photography.

By focusing on early African American practices of photography, *Pictures and Progress* highlights the multifaceted intellectual, cultural, and political work of African Americans who have been recognized to date primarily for their contributions to literature and oration. Several chapters restore the wide-ranging cultural production of these prominent figures, cutting against the tendencies of academic disciplines to more narrowly define cultural work according to discrete categories. In this sense the collection also contributes to important recent scholarship that expands visual culture studies to include producers who think, write about, and

use images in ways that transform their possible purpose and meaning. In other words, *Pictures and Progress* aims in part to show that the intersection of literary studies and visual culture studies is a rich and generative point of departure for understanding the cultural work of images.⁹

African Americans had a particular stake in practicing photography and engaging its emerging visual culture in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. For while photography offered Americans an unprecedented opportunity for self-representation, it offered African Americans that opportunity as they were making claims on new legal, political, and socially recognized American identities. For many African Americans, photography served not only as a means of self-representation but also as a political tool with which to claim a place in public and private spheres circumscribed by race and racialized sight lines. The photograph became a key site through which a new identity could be produced and promulgated.¹⁰

The chapters collected here give a sense of the high stakes involved in early African American practices of photography, delineating not only the heavy weight of a legacy of racist misrepresentation but also the material conditions of slavery and racial violence against which photography was wielded. In this context, African American faith in photography, in tiny bits of glass, metal, and paper flung in the face of slavery or the lynch mob, seems extraordinary. But, of course, photographs were not expected to accomplish radical social change on their own. They were but part of multifaceted social justice campaigns. Photographs entered, engaged, and transformed political and philosophical debates and social activism, and photographs were also shaped by those efforts.



No African American figure in the nineteenth century was more effusive or eloquent about the advent of photography than Frederick Douglass, and none evidenced so dialectical an apprehension of its discovery. Although it is mostly for his rhetorical genius that Douglass is remembered above the nineteenth century's other black men of mark, Douglass himself understood that the new age was one of pictures more than words. His lectures "The Age of Pictures," "Lecture on Pictures," "Pictures and Progress," and "Life Pictures" enthused over photography's social and epistemological potential. In his 1861 address, "Pictures and Progress," he praised "the great father of our modern picture," Louis-Jacques-Mandé Daguerre, for "the multitude, variety, perfection and cheapness" of his pictures.

Daguerre, by simple but all abounding sunlight has converted the planet into a picture gallery. As munificent in the exalted arena of art, as in the radiation of light and heat, the God of day not only decks the earth with rich fruit and beautiful flowers—but studs the world with pictures. Daguerreotypes, Ambrotypes, Photographs and Electrotypes, good and bad, now adorn or disfigure all our dwellings. . . . Men of all conditions may see themselves as others see them. What was once the exclusive luxury of the rich and great is now within reach of all.¹¹

That the country was just entering upon a war with itself at exactly the time Douglass desired to preach on pictures did not escape him. In a later version of his “Pictures and Progress” oration (probably early in 1865) Douglass acknowledged the “seeming transgression” of desiring to lecture on pictures, “in view of the stupendous contest of which this country is now in the theater, this fierce and sanguinary debate between freedom and slavery.”¹² But the war, he perceived, was rapidly coming to a close, and he believed that “each new period, and each new condition seeks its needed and appropriate representation.”¹³ For Douglass and others, it was photography that was to be looked to for an “appropriate representation” of the dynamic new period ahead.

Among other things, Douglass applauded the accessibility of photography for ordinary people: “The humblest servant girl may now possess a picture of herself such as the wealth of kings could not purchase fifty years ago.”¹⁴ Leveling social hierarchies of portraiture that had been in place for centuries, photography offered a ubiquitous and seemingly universal tool of self-representation. But while the very proliferation of possibilities for picture making that photography enabled was noteworthy in itself, Douglass also suggested that more expansive forms of social change and thought might be effected by images beyond the mere fact of their universal consumption.

Indeed, one cannot overstate the importance Douglass accorded pictures. He argued that it was the “picture making faculty” that fundamentally determined what it meant to be human; “picture making” and “picture appreciating” distinguished men from animals: “The process by which man is able to invert his own subjective consciousness into the objective form, considered in all its range, is in truth the highest attribute of man’s nature.”¹⁵ And as picture making uniquely defined human nature, so did it also serve as the impetus for all progress. For Douglass, picture making and viewing provided the primary catalyst for social change as these practices uniquely enabled criticism: “It is the picture of life contrasted with the fact

of life, the ideal contrasted with the real, which makes criticism possible. Where there is no criticism there is no progress—for the want of progress is not felt where such want is not made visible by criticism.” It is only by making ourselves and others objects of “observation and contemplation” that we can begin to imagine better selves and better futures. Portraits uniquely enable us to “see our interior selves as distinct personalities as though looking in a glass,” and from this “power we possess of making ourselves objective to ourselves,” arises the potential for “self-criticism out of which comes the highest attainments of human excellence.”¹⁶ For Douglass, pictures enable us to see ourselves as if from the outside and, from this more distanced view, to contemplate and assess ourselves, drawing up plans for improvement. Encouraging self-critique in this way, pictures, according to Douglass, are the very foundation of progress, and photographic portraits can be catalysts for social change.

The recovery of Douglass’s lectures on the social promise of photography poses a critical challenge to the prevailing view of him as “black master of the verbal arts.” In 1987, with a century of biographical writing on Douglass supporting him, Henry Louis Gates Jr. posited Douglass as the first black “Representative Man” in American letters, pronouncing Douglass a “Representative Man because he was Rhetorical Man.”¹⁷ Since Gates’s persuasive, path-breaking criticism on Douglass, few scholars have had any reason to imagine the ways Douglass’s urgency to represent a collective Africanist voice to European racialists and slavery apologists might exceed writing.

During the Enlightenment and for some time afterward, the most important European thinkers—Immanuel Kant, David Hume, G. W. F. Hegel, and others—maintained that the absence of a visible black writing tradition attesting to the African’s historical self-consciousness proved the African was not, in fact, innately human in the way the civilized European so decidedly was. Lacking a literature, the African possessed no voice, no expression of his objective differentiation from what Hegel described as “the universality of his essential being.”¹⁸ Although Douglass’s commitment to registering a self-conscious, and thus human, black voice was pursued sensibly in public letters, to argue for the primacy of pictures in the age of reason and writing is no contradiction.

“Voice, after all, presupposes a face,” Gates reminds us.¹⁹ And a clear black voice presupposes the vision of a unified black subject whose face is the picturable assurance of his objective self-knowledge. As his several lectures intimate, Douglass looked eagerly to photography to lend a new

empiricism to the truth of the African's humanity and to the propitiousness of the future of the freeman.

Douglass intuited that photographs would uniquely carry the past into any future they might inspire. While providing an impetus toward progress, photographs would also conserve the past, allowing one both to measure distance from and to remain connected to previous epochs. Douglass proclaimed: "It is evident that the great cheapness, and universality of pictures, must exert a powerful though silent influence, upon the ideas and sentiment of [the time] present [and] future generations."²⁰ In the persistence of photographs, in the presence of absent subjects over time, Douglass saw a force that could shape the future. Loved ones absent or gone, preserved and treasured in the miniature forms of photographs, would maintain their presence and exert influence over their descendants. In this way the most common of photographic forms, the family portrait, could shape the present and future of African American life.

One of the most striking aspects of Douglass's response to pictures is his optimism. The unique capacity of humans to objectify themselves in images provides the grounds for study, criticism, and improvement. The idea that photography enables men and women to "see themselves as others see them" is productive for Douglass. His estimation holds nothing of the negative, shattering effect of Du Bois's later understanding of "looking at one's self through the eyes of others," which defined for him the state of "double consciousness."²¹ Whereas Du Bois would emphasize the power of racism to distort the self-image of African Americans, Douglass imagined a much more autonomous African American viewer, seeking progress and improvement through a study of the self objectified as image. In Douglass's account, African Americans are the primary and most important viewers of their own images.

Although optimistic, Douglass was also highly attuned to the importance of the struggle over and for representation, and like Du Bois, he knew photographs circulated in a contested visual culture. Describing it as a "mighty power," Douglass proclaims that "this picture making faculty is flung out into the world—like all others—subject to a wild scramble between contending interests and forces."²² Douglass particularly contended against the force of scientific racism institutionalized by the American School of Ethnology.²³ Indeed, while Douglass has long been a founding figure of African American literature and history, his place in the black social sciences, from W. E. B. Du Bois and Zora Neale Hurston to Frantz Fanon and, more recently, Stuart Hall, deserves special note. Although cast for the most part in a dialectical register, Douglass's lectures on pictures an-

ticipate a later assumption in black empirical thought, namely that a scopic regime subtends scientific racism in the modern West. Photography does not so much subvert the scopic regime for Douglass as it promises to re-adjust its sight lines and correct its habits of racist misrecognition. “The Age of Pictures,” “Lecture on Pictures,” “Pictures and Progress,” and “Life Pictures,” then, may belong as much to a canon of early black scholarship set against the scientific racism of the American School of Ethnology as to the prehistory of formal black philosophical discourse.

Put another way, despite their vague phenomenological cast, Douglass’s meditations on pictures are of a piece with other, more scientifically driven works of nineteenth-century antiracist thought, including Martin Delaney’s *The Condition, Elevation, Emigration, and Destiny of the Colored People of the United States, Politically Considered* (1852) and James McCune Smith’s “Civilization: Its Dependence on Physical Circumstances” (1859). These important works oppose and answer back to a prevailing hegemony of academic proslavery apology advanced by the likes of the American ethnographers Samuel George Morton and Josiah Nott. However, Douglass’s reflections on pictures and the promise of photography may share the closest kinship with James McCune Smith’s “Heads of the Colored People” (1859), a series of ten sketches published in *Frederick Douglass’ Paper* between 1852 and 1854. Together, “Heads of the Colored People” and Douglass’s lectures give the lie to the pseudosciences of polygenesis, phrenology, and craniology in starkly visual terms. Far more intentionally than McCune Smith, however, Douglass fashioned a theory of visibility years ahead of its time. His own face, pictured in scores of daguerreotypes, tintypes, and engravings from the period, would prove to give that theory not only its “proper representation” but its proper “voice” as well.



Pictures and Progress brings to light the wide-ranging practices of early African American photography that Douglass celebrated, and it also attends to the more elusive social, political, and even epistemic ideals he saw rooted in picture making and its appreciation. This edited volume brings together chapters by scholars in a number of different fields to illuminate the historically understated influence of photography on African American cultural, political, and expressive production. It seeks to understand the many different meanings African Americans accorded photography and the variety of effects photography had on racialized thinking. It explores how African

Americans adopted and utilized photography in all its cultural forms to represent a new people, a new period, and new modes of black thought.

Laura Wexler opens with a discussion of the little-known public lectures Douglass gave in 1861 and 1865, delivered under the same heading as the title of this volume. She attends closely and carefully to Douglass's lectures on pictures, putting them into dialogue with their immediate audience as well as presenting their challenge to later theories of photography. She argues that Douglass was responding directly to Lincoln's inaugural addresses and that the conceptual shifts in his lectures on pictures accord with transformations in Lincoln's thoughts about the nation. Showing how deeply imbedded the lectures were in the important conversations of their moment, Wexler also shows how Douglass's lectures offer a theory of photography that expands modern conceptions of photography. She claims that Douglass's photography theory broadens understandings of the medium currently dominated by three subjects—photographer, viewer, and sitter—by proposing a fourth position, the *revenant*, or the one who returns from social death. Douglass is portrayed as a thinker deeply engaged in the most important national and technological debates of his time, whose insights extend well beyond his moment, offering new ways to think about the meaning and import of photography today.

Ginger Hill also studies Douglass's lectures on pictures. Examining closely Douglass's ongoing public thoughts on the critical meaningfulness of the advent of photography, she argues that more than an orator, writer, and publisher, Frederick Douglass was "a visual theorist." Douglass's lectures reflect the mind of a philosopher, a deep-thinking gnostic, equally as much as an abolitionist. As Hill shows quite powerfully, Douglass's fascination with photographs is not foremost an aesthetic one in his lectures but one very nearly phenomenological in character. Hill's study of Douglass's multiple lectures reveals the man to have found gripping the new technology's capacity for "photographing the soul." And, of course, Douglass's reworking of theories of human interiority implicitly bore on the place each soul held on the social hierarchy and thus, for Douglass, on racial progress. Carefully examining Douglass's multifaceted visual theory, Hill also proposes that Douglass was more than an *abstract* theorist, and her focus on how often Douglass sat for portraits suggests that he was enacting theory as well.

Evidently, however, Douglass was not black America's only practical visual theorist. For Sojourner Truth, as well, photography was part of a broader set of self-representational strategies she used to claim an autho-

rized voice and an audience for her work. Augusta Rohrbach examines the ways in which the famous orator crafted her photographic portraits to signal self-possession. Rohrbach shows how Truth utilized the photograph to claim her embodied presence for an audience, a presence she also celebrated in her commitment to orality over print culture. As Truth promoted herself through print, and through the writing of others, she announced her ultimate control over those representations by marking her presence in photographs. However, as she drew upon the indexicality of the photograph to mark her presence, she also cannily manipulated the pose to produce a persona, playing with both the constructed nature of the photograph and its associations with unmediated representation. According to Rohrbach, Truth utilized a variety of representational forms to create a marketable persona over the course of her life, but her self-fashioning is most evident in her photographic portraits and her shrewd use of the photograph's varied cultural meaning and power. For Rohrbach, Truth is an implicit feminist challenge to the priority and originality of ideas with which Douglass is traditionally credited, both in this volume and elsewhere.

Following chapters by Wexler, Hill, and Rohrbach is the first of four critical "snapshots" written by Shawn Michelle Smith. These snapshots are historical reflections on the visual practices of several early African American photographers. Snapshot 1, "Unredeemed Realities: Augustus Washington," foregrounds the Connecticut portrait photographer's haunting daguerreotype of the radical abolitionist John Brown in order to show how historic photographic images may serve an unrealized futurity as much as the narrative interests of history itself. It also anticipates the concern of Michael Chaney, P. Gabrielle Foreman, and Ray Sapirstein for the visual politics of slavery, abolitionism, and "uplift."

As Chaney shows, for example, Harriet Jacobs challenged the decororealization of white subjects promised by the early visual technology of the camera obscura in her critique of slavery's visual culture. Consistently highlighting vision, especially looking, as inescapably embodied in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*, Jacobs grounds vision within the political landscape of slavery. She refuses to allow her reader the removed and disembodied vantage of the camera obscura, always placing the reader, by proxy, within slavery. Challenging the blindness of sentimental vision, as well as the privilege of the distanced view of the camera obscura, Jacobs insists that slavery must be seen from within.

While for some, like Jacobs, photography was simply the most con-

crete example of a racialized visuality, others used photography in ways that undermined the photograph's claim to make race visible. As Gabrielle Foreman powerfully shows, light-skinned heirs to a long legacy of forced interracial mixing could deploy the associations of photography with visual verisimilitude to challenge the definition of race according to visual signs. Foreman explores how several light-skinned African American women utilized photography to pass through representations coded "white," undermining the visual determinacy of race even as they claimed African American identities. Importantly, Foreman emphasizes that women made these strategic interventions in order to claim the legal, economic, and social rights of their white look-alikes but to do so as *African American* women. They utilized the photograph to pass *through* whiteness to a more fully autonomous African American identity.

Shifting the emphasis away from the abolitionist politics of the visual, highlighted by Chaney and Foreman, to the local politics of image production, Ray Sapirstein examines the understudied work of the Hampton Camera Club, a group of mostly white photographers and teachers at the Hampton Institute who photographed rural black life in Virginia for six of Paul Laurence Dunbar's volumes of poetry. Situating these photographs within the context of the racist caricature that prevailed at the time, while also comparing them to other forms of documentary practice, and reading them alongside Dunbar's poetry, Sapirstein reveals how the Hampton Camera Club posed African Americans at thresholds of social and historical change and considers how photographers and subjects could use these images strategically as "masks," carefully controlling what viewers would and would not see.

Snapshot 2, "Reproducing Black Masculinity: Thomas Askew," reflects upon the problem of black male misrepresentation in public life at the turn of the century and upon Askew's labor to create an image not simply of proper middle-class black masculinity but also of its reproducibility, both visually and socially. Snapshot 2 thematizes the visual politics of masculinity. It presages the prurient and political white interest in visible black male bodies explored by Suzanne Schneider in her re-reading of Louis Agassiz's infamous daguerreotypes of enslaved men and women. Schneider incites us to see Agassiz in these images and to recognize his homoerotic desire for the black male bodies under his putatively scientific gaze. As Schneider argues, viewers have too often been captured by the legitimizing discourse of science and its purportedly objective gaze, the same discourse that authorized Agassiz, and it has blinded them to the pornographic nature of the images and of Agassiz's investment in them. Schneider encour-

ages us to read these images against the grain of scientific “evidence” and to see them as records of the scientist’s desire.

Maurice Wallace turns our attention to the production of the African American Civil War portrait. He argues that the production of so many cartes de visite of black men in uniform served to harmonize black men to the post-emancipation imperatives of national manhood. Against the contemporaneous shadow images of the mug shot and their visual codification of the myths of black male incorrigibility and sub-humanity, these images, Wallace contends, participated in no less than the invention of black manhood as a viable, culturally intelligible category of social identity. This is not a triumphalist argument, however. For, as Wallace is careful to point out, the dubious invention of black manhood in this wartime context relied upon these pictures’ power to lie, deceive, and manipulate in such a way as to hide the wartime labor of black women and, thus, sacrifice their lives to the visual spectacularity of shiny brass buttons and crisp Union caps. Further, Wallace shows how the photographic chiasmus of “before and after” that U.S. Colonel Reuben D. Mussey designed when Private Hubbard Pryor of the Forty-fourth United States Colored Troops sat for his likenesses (one slave, one free) might be reversed and, in effect, subverted. Black men risk losing too—the violence of war and slavery indelibly written on their skin obscured by the dignifying camouflage of uniform. In more ways than one, then, photography has “framed” black male subjects forcefully.

As reliably as black male subjects have been “framed” by the duplicities of photography, early black photographers like A. P. Bedou worked to call attention to the practical framing of photographs, to the act of photographing registered within the photograph itself, in other words, and to effectively disrupt the otherwise invisible machinations of the “frame-up” vexing the photographic archive of black masculinity. Smith’s “Unfixing the Frame(-up): A. P. Bedou,” Snapshot 3, announces the theoretical concerns, if not also the very methodology, of chapters that follow by Smith and Leigh Raiford on W. E. B. Du Bois and Ida B. Wells, respectively, as photo strategists of racial progress and political sympathy.

Smith examines the photographs W. E. B. Du Bois compiled for the Paris Exposition of 1900, attending to their strange formal consonance with both criminal mug shots and middle-class portraits. Signifying across the bounds of property and propriety that separated criminal from upstanding middle-class citizen, Du Bois’s photographs, according to Smith, challenge the discourses and images of “negro criminality” that reinforced the racialized boundaries of the white middle class at the turn of the cen-

tury. In Du Bois's hands the photograph becomes a disruptive force that troubles the oppositional paradigms of race and racism.

Resistance to representations of racism and its violence through photography were both subtle and overt. In her discussion of photography in the political work of Ida B. Wells, Leigh Raiford shows how Wells transformed a surprising range of photographs into antilynching images. Wells famously reproduced lynching photographs in her texts, turning the white lynch mob's moral outrage and protestations of black savagery back on themselves. In an original reading, Raiford shows how Wells also inventively used her own portrait, and the family portrait of a lynch victim's survivors, as antilynching photographs. The "political portrait" of lynching's survivors emphasized the place of African American women in the struggle against lynching and affirmed a politicized community of mourners. Shifting focus away from the abject male body as icon of lynching, the political family portrait drew attention to what the white mob's images obscured—African American communities of affection and resistance. Through her reading of Wells's varied deployment of photographs, Raiford widens the scope of lynching and antilynching's visual archive.

The final chapter is immediately preceded by Snapshot 4, "The Photographer's Touch: J. P. Ball." This snapshot shares a thematic focus on lynching with the previous two chapters, as well as an emphasis on the liberatory impulse to "unfix the frame(-up)" by calling attention to the act of photographing within the photographic field. It also harmonizes with Cheryl Finley's concluding chapter, as both deal with the material tactility of photographs. Finley reads closely and carefully an album of nineteenth-century tintypes of anonymous African American men and women. She considers how the art auction through which the album *came into her hands* resonates disturbingly with other auctions that might have haunted the album's subjects. Further, she considers the unique but always only partial testimony that anonymous photographs convey. Literally, in Finley's hands the anonymous images become not symbols of loss but tangible sources of creative imagining that provide an enigmatic promise to the future. As Frederick Douglass predicted, photographs of the past continue to inform the present, and Finley explores the persistence of photographic images and their importance for later generations.

In all, the chapters collected here exhibit the exciting work that is being done across disciplines in early African American photography. This work has much to teach us about African American social and cultural history and much to teach us about photography as well. Indeed, this work is helping to chart a new course in photography studies, shifting the focus of analy-

sis away from the photographer as sole producer of photographic meaning to the subject as performer and the viewer and collector as interpreters of photographic meaning.²⁴ Although the edited volume is weighted toward the productive uses of photography's early consumers, it does not neglect the important work of early African American photographers.

Pictures and Progress is about what subjects, consumers, viewers, and photographers *do* with photographs. It explores how African Americans made photographs and produced photographic meaning in the service of social progress—how African Americans *practiced* photography—in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As Frederick Douglass noted at the time, the late nineteenth century was indeed the “age of pictures,” and photography helped to define the ethos of the era as well as direct the path of African American advancement. *Pictures and Progress* shows how African Americans sought to envision the “condition” and create “appropriate representation[s]” of black identity for the modern future.

Notes

1. See Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000); Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers 1840 to the Present* (New York: Norton, 2000); Allan Sekula, “The Body and the Archive,” *October* 39 (1986): 3–64; and Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Noonday Press, 1977).

2. Walter Benjamin, “A Short History of Photography,” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980), 199.

3. Paul Valéry, “The Centenary of Photography,” in *Classic Essays on Photography*, ed. Alan Trachtenberg (New Haven: Leete’s Island Books, 1980), 193–94.

4. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860–1880* (New York: The Free Press, 1998), xix.

5. Jackie Napolean Wilson, *Hidden Witness: African-American Images from the Dawn of Photography to the Civil War* (New York: St. Martin’s Press, 1999), ix.

6. Nicholas Mirzoeff, “The Shadow and the Substance: Race, Photography, and the Index,” in *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, ed. Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis (New York: Henry N. Abrams, Inc., 2003), 112.

7. Allan Sekula’s work has been especially influential in this regard. See Sekula, “Body and the Archive.” Looking at visual culture more broadly, Michael Harris has studied the circulation of racist images in the nineteenth century, as well as African American artists’ reappropriation and recontextualization of them. See Michael D. Harris, *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003).

8. Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black*; and Deborah Willis, ed., *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography* (New York: The New Press, 1994).

9. Several recent books have explored that intersection in the later period of the Harlem Renaissance: Sara Blair, *Harlem Crossroads: Black Writers and the Photograph in the Twentieth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007); Anne Elizabeth Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005); Cherene Sherrard-Johnson, *Portraits of the New Negro Woman: Visual and Literary Culture in the Harlem Renaissance* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).

10. Henry Louis Gates Jr., “The Face and Voice of Blackness,” in *Facing History: The Black Image in American Art, 1710–1940*, by Guy C. McElroy (San Francisco: Bedford Arts, 1990). Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, with contributions by Emily K. Shubert, *Portraits of a People: Picturing African Americans in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 2006). Deborah Willis, *Let Your Motto Be Resistance* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution, 2007).

11. Frederick Douglass, “Pictures and Progress: An Address Delivered in Boston, Massachusetts, on 3 December 1861,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One, Speeches, Debates, and Interviews; Volume Three*, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 452–53.

12. Frederick Douglass, “Pictures and Progress” [1865], Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress: Speech, Article, and Book file, 1846–1894 and Undated; American Memory, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, available online at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/doughtml/dougFolder5.html>, ms. page 1.

13. Frederick Douglass, “The Age of Pictures” in “Lecture on Pictures” [title varies], Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress: Speech, Article, and Book file—A: Frederick Douglass, Dated; American Memory, Library of Congress Manuscript Division, available online at <http://memory.loc.gov/ammem/doughtml/dougFolder5.html>, ms. page 35.

14. Douglass, “Pictures and Progress” [1865], Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress, ms. page 8.

15. *Ibid.*, ms. page 12.

16. *Ibid.*, ms. page 18.

17. Henry Louis Gates Jr., *Figures in Black: Words, Signs, and the ‘Racial’ Self* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1987), 108, 115.

18. G. W. F. Hegel, *The Philosophy of History*, trans. J. Jibree (New York: 1956), 93.

19. Gates, *Figures in Black*, 104. Although Gates did not invoke photography specifically as a complement to writing’s powers of black self-creation, his ongoing concern for the meaning-filled “face” of the ex-slave Douglass raises the visual to an equal tropological status with the vocal in African American literature and history: “There remains to be done a great work of scholarship, one that in full rhetorical power can create a life of Frederick Douglass. . . . Perhaps a great scholar can restore to the life of Douglass its decidedly human face. . . . Just as [John] Blassingame has given to Douglass that fact [Douglass’s certain date of birth] for which he searched to his death in vain, so perhaps will he give us the face of Douglass

as resplendently as he has given us, through his speeches and writings, Douglass's great and terrible voice" (124).

20. Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress: An Address Delivered in Boston, Massachusetts, on 3 December 1861," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Volume Three*, ed. Blassingame, 458.

21. See Shawn Michelle Smith's chapter included here and *Photography on the Color Line: W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004).

22. Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures," Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress: Speech, Article, and Book file—A: Frederick Douglass, Dated, ms. page 12.

23. Frederick Douglass, "The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered: An Address, Before the Literary Societies of Western Reserve College, at Commencement, July 12, 1854, Delivered in Hudson, Ohio," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One, Speeches, Debates, and Interviews; Volume Two, 1847-1854*, ed. John W. Blassingame (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 497-525.

24. Richard Powell provides extensive analysis of the subject's agency in black portraiture in Richard J. Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008).