

To Make Their Own Way  
in the World

*The Enduring Legacy  
of the Zealy Daguerreotypes*

*Edited by*  
Ilisa Barbash  
Molly Rogers  
Deborah Willis

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*With a foreword by*

Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

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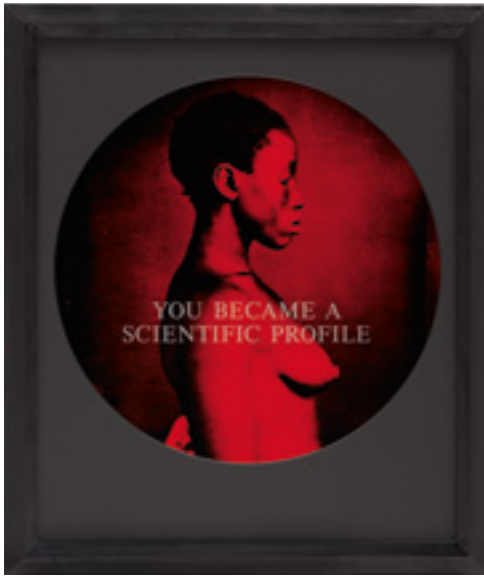
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*Louis Agassiz, Joseph T. Zealy,  
Carrie Mae Weems, and the Politics  
of Undress in the Photography  
of Racial Science*

Sarah Elizabeth Lewis

Each day as I walk to my classroom to teach, I pass a small blue and white oval marker in the foliage at the entrance to the Harvard Art Museums stating that the building is on the site of Harvard University zoology and geology professor Louis Agassiz's former home. If the visitor does not know of Agassiz, the first floor of the museum often has a work on display that unwittingly makes part of his history plain—a four-paneled photographic piece by Carrie Mae Weems from her landmark installation *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried* (1995–96). In this work, Weems has appropriated daguerreotypes originally taken for Agassiz by Joseph T. Zealy in 1850 as part of an attempt to prove the theory of polygenesis, that different races were in fact separate species. The images present front-facing, bare-chested and bare-breasted women and men—the African and American-born, enslaved, South Carolina-based father-and-daughter pairs Renty and Delia, Jack and Drana (fig. 11.1). Weems sandblasted words on the glass over the blood-red-tinted chromogenic prints that create a narrative through the succinct summary: YOU BECAME A SCIENTIFIC PROFILE / A NEGROID TYPE / AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEBATE / & A PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECT. In 1976, the daguerreotypes had been discovered in an attic of Harvard's Peabody Museum of Archaeology and Ethnology, a few blocks down the street from the Harvard Art Museums. They were among a set of fifteen daguerreotypes that had remained long hidden, forgotten, but were revealed when they were discovered by museum staff members in the attic of the Peabody. Weems used the Zealy images two decades later for her series, forcibly unclocking the Zealy daguerreotypes when she defied an initial agreement with the Peabody Museum to not make use of the images. Harvard University threatened to sue her for utilizing the images without its permission but decided against it, and later the Harvard Art Museums purchased a part of the installation which nestled



**Figure 11.1.**  
Carrie Mae Weems, *You Became a Scientific Profile, a Negroid Type, an Anthropological Debate, and a Photographic Subject*, 1995–96, from the series *From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried*. Four monochrome C-prints with sandblasted text on glass



Figure 11.2.  
Joseph T. Zealy, *Delia*, 1850. Quarter-plate daguerreotype in case

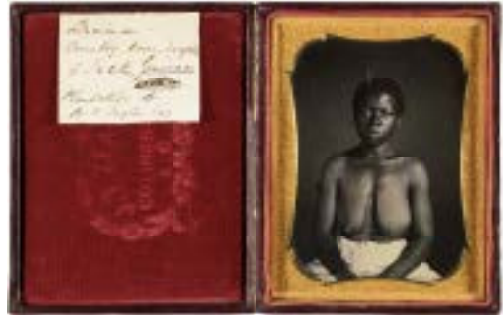


Figure 11.3.  
Joseph T. Zealy, *Drana*, 1850. Quarter-plate daguerreotype in case

Weems's work as a challenge, a counter-archive set at the site of Agassiz's former home.<sup>1</sup>

In the history of pictorial representation, it is one thing to appear nude and quite another to be portrayed as a body shown stripped, partially naked, an index of having been forcibly revealed.<sup>2</sup> Once seen, the images are hard to forget: the Zealy daguerreotypes present women and men as partially unclothed, as if a covering had been peeled off to offer their bodies as evidence to the eye, turning clothed sitters into unveiled objects for comparative anatomical viewing. Two epigraphic images here are of *Delia* and *Drana*: both sit, breasts exposed, with their hands on top of their dresses, bunched on their laps, a state of half-dress not befitting a portrait for which one has any agency or control (figs. 11.2 and 11.3). (There are full frontal nudes of male subjects, as well.) As Deborah Willis and Carla Williams have argued, “the sight of their clothing unceremoniously pulled down,” in this partial state of undress, is “more revealing and ultimately more exploitative of their bodies than their nudity would have been,” as symbols of the “unnatural and humiliating aspect of their condition.”<sup>3</sup> The full set of Zealy's daguerreotypes is so chilling that I often debate whether and, more specifically, how I should let students view them in my courses on the history of photography, race, and citizenship, particularly as the site of my classroom in the Harvard Art Museums, resting as it does on the foundation of Agassiz's home, charges them to see themselves in lineage with Agassiz's students and as active participants in the history of rights, representation, and citizenship in this country. Regardless of my decision, students invariably have the same questions even if they only see the images as reproductions or study them as appropriated in Weems's photographic intervention on the very site of Agassiz's former home: Do we know the identities of the descendants of the sitters? Moreover, even if we do not know their identities, how can we honor their lives? Weems's series has addressed similar questions and was inspired by a similar meditative stance.



For all of the discussion of Weems’s color-based, scale-dependent, and text-focused intervention, there is little mention of the significance of her decision to excise the portion of clothing in each daguerreotype that shows the sitter in a state of half-dress.<sup>4</sup> Her appropriation of Zealy’s daguerreotypes partially conceals the material evidence of the forced disrobing of Delia, Drana, Jack, and Renty through the framed cropping and tondo presentation. In Weems’s work, their hands on their laps, resting on their clothes, are out of view. Weems’s series focuses us on the daguerreotype subjects’ faces and features as parts of an etched sentence to underscore an insistent act of display, an instrumental use of such images for the purpose of racial science. The portions of the succinct sentence YOU BECAME A SCIENTIFIC PROFILE / A NEGROID TYPE / AN ANTHROPOLOGICAL DEBATE / & A PHOTOGRAPHIC SUBJECT can be read across the plates. The active “you” recalls that there is an actor at work; that is to say, the sentence shifts our focus from an abstracted system of scientific racism to the presence of agency, to the fact that a set of individuals directed these subjects in these images. Weems’s text calls out actions, the evidence that resulted in what the artist calls the sitters’ “ordeal of being photographed,” one that can be read through the sartorial display and their state of partial and complete undress.<sup>5</sup>

This essay addresses the development in the nineteenth century in which representations of half-dressed black bodies in an image transformed art into evidence, pictures into proof for the project of racial science. After Zealy took these daguerreotypes, the pictorial gesture of the insistent reveal—the indexical trace of forcibly undressing a subject through partial disrobing—shifted through its association with the abolitionist movement and representations of emancipation. This partial disrobing—from the widely disseminated photograph of Private Gordon’s “Scourged Back” in a state of half dress to Sojourner Truth’s use of her image and performance of deliberate undressing in 1858—became a frame for images and performative displays that constituted a rebuke of the institution of slavery and the hierarchy of racial science.<sup>6</sup>

Why dwell on the reliance on this chilling gesture of forced, partial undress in the composition of Zealy’s daguerreotypes, particularly in the context of their intended use by Agassiz? It trains our gaze on the fact that in the history of representation, the half-dressed black body, particularly that of black women in the context of American abolition, became a conceptual challenge as it transformed images used for racial science into ones used in arguments to honor the full extent of human life. This history is an extension of the vast practice of using clothing, the “manufactured good *par excellence*,” as an instrument for dominance, resistance, and control in the “battle for selfhood” in the history of colonialism that was waged on the “terrain” of subjected black bodies, as the anthropologists Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff have argued.<sup>7</sup> While the topic of this essay is not

the use of clothing as a sign of coercion and resistance across the African diaspora, it is important to emphasize that this action operated on both a chronological and a diasporic continuum.<sup>8</sup> Yet in the history of American abolition, the reversal of this connection has been undertheorized and is far less understood. If it has been overlooked as a mutable, corporeal template in the context of American abolition, it is because scholars have, quite rightly, focused on the visual rhetoric of what would come later through the history of anthropometric photography—bodies completely stripped and set against a grid in frontal and side views in an attempt to turn photographs into regularized data for colonial and imperial projects. This is the history of images being used beginning in the nineteenth century as an index of racial science.<sup>9</sup>

Weems's installation is a reminder of the bi-temporal nature of the Zealy daguerreotypes, providing a way to reexamine the intention of these images for the project of racial science. The composition of enslaved and freed black bodies, forcibly undressed, functioned as a mutable symbol in the antebellum and Civil War periods, threatening the descriptive force of the portraits of racial science. The changing symbolism of the insistently revealed enslaved is one factor that might explain the failed futurity of the Zealy daguerreotypes, why they had long remained cloaked. Agassiz, prolific as he was, did not use them as evidence beyond showing them at a meeting of the Cambridge Scientific Club. He unveiled these images in a lecture there in 1850 and, as far as scholars know, never used them in a lecture or publication again.<sup>10</sup> What emerges by tracing the reliance on the gesture of the insistent reveal in twentieth-century American representation is photography's productively unstable revelatory function—it could serve to legitimate the foundations of racial science and later, as Frederick Douglass would argue, to dislodge it entirely.



In order to understand why Zealy's daguerreotypes engaged with this template of partial disrobing, it is necessary to turn first to the naturalist's methods before his interest in racial science, when his pioneering achievement was identifying the "Great Ice Age," viewing the world—Alpine glaciers specifically—through a process of uncloaking.<sup>11</sup> For Agassiz, ice sheets were dynamic, and he argued that it was key to see what they had left behind as if viewing drawings on the earth. In this sense, seeing geological time was a process of peeling back layers, and this method was embedded in how he spoke about his epoch-revealing work.

After being appointed to the faculty at Harvard in 1847, Agassiz was known for training his students to cultivate an insistent gaze—visual disrobing instantiated as a method of trained observation for natural science for the purpose of identification and classification. "I have taught men to

observe,” Agassiz said about his life’s work.<sup>12</sup> An example comes to us from a famous story told by one of his former students who spent a week with a decomposing specimen for his first assignment, looking at it for hours each passing day—first casually, then with more tenacity, then by drawing—with Agassiz telling him all the while to continue looking. These teachings are echoed in the tales of his exploits with a set of students and naturalist colleagues who traveled with him on a ten-week trip to Lake Superior in the summer of 1848. He aimed to teach the public and his students that what defined a species could come only from enduring attention, viewing the natural world as if peeling an object to drive to its essence.

The images of partially disrobed and naked enslaved sitters in the Zealy daguerreotypes from approximately two years later suggest that they, too, were tied to how methods of comparative anatomy had conditioned the act of viewing, isolating, and comparing physical differences to turn a sitter into a specimen. The composition of the Zealy daguerreotypes relied upon an insistent disrobing that was consonant with the repeated gaze so central to Agassiz’s naturalist method. The photographs also function as a compositional index of the act of enduring observation central to the project of natural science.

Agassiz was part of what we now call the “American school” of ethnology, an anthropological approach that used pictures to “read the Negro out of the human family” to support the idea of polygenesis, as Douglass emphasized in his 1854 lecture “The Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered.” Before evolutionary theory took hold, the idea of polygenesis, set against monogenesis—the belief that human beings were all part of the same species—was seen as a uniquely American development for the then young republic, and it commanded the attention of European naturalists who saw this as part of the “American school.”<sup>13</sup> In 1854, the widely known antebellum racial treatise *Types of Mankind*, by the polygenesists Josiah C. Nott and George R. Gliddon, included Agassiz’s essay “Sketch of the Natural Provinces of the Animal World and their Relation to the Different Types of Man,” which was circulated among scientists and physicians such as Oliver Wendell Holmes and had placed the head of the famous Apollo Belvedere sculpture next to a chimpanzee and a gape-mouthed black man in order to show a hierarchy of human races. Nott was interested not only in how visual representation could support the theory of polygenesis, but, as a slaveholder and a medical doctor himself, he also wanted to show how a comparative view of parts of the body displayed evidence of a natural hierarchy of humankind. The half-cloaked photographs resonated with the desire of naturalists such as Agassiz to show how viewing the physical form was as central to the project of racial science as were images used to reify stereotypes.

Agassiz was also working at the time when the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act formally made the penetrating act of looking over citizens for signs

of enslaved status a civic action enforceable by law that secured the racial landscape, as scholar of art and visual culture Jasmine Nichole Cobb deftly argues.<sup>14</sup> The law made the failure to report sighting a fugitive slave an act of treason, while runaway slave ads used visuality as a new form of data in the racial landscape. The country became conscripted into a new relationship with ocularity as a tactic used to secure racial hierarchies.

The act of reading a photograph in the nineteenth century, whether vernacular or scientific, was also congruent with the naturalist's method of repeated viewing. The new medium of photography became tied to disclosure, a sense that it could reveal what was hidden to the untrained eye. In the mid-nineteenth century, photography was deeply connected to the body as a form of corporeal reveal. The very act of sitting for a daguerreotype was enough to prompt wondering about phenomenology. Holmes would describe photographs as images cast off from the body, "throwing off certain images like themselves," as he imagined what Democritus would have made of the material, "a metallic speculum," so astounding that "one of the films his face was shedding should stick there."<sup>15</sup> Much of Holmes's famous essay "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph" focuses on the process of photography, yet in his article on the "Doings of the Sunbeam" in the *Atlantic Monthly*, what is often overlooked is how he likened photography to this idea of a physical reveal, as if "films . . . perpetually shed from the surfaces of solids, as bark is shed from trees."<sup>16</sup> Throughout Holmes's writings on photography between 1859 and 1863, he uses the terms *photograph* and *specimen* interchangeably, as if to underscore photography's connection to a bodily and scientific context.<sup>17</sup> "Glass views on the Rhine, and of the Pyrenees in Spain" are, for Holmes, "specimens," as are the glass plates he received of California that he discusses in a summary of the photographic process replete with chemical-focused explanations.<sup>18</sup> He likens the process of preparing photographic slides to the scientific stages of preparing a plate to view specimens. It is an analogy that underscores the discursive link between photography, the body, and visual disclosure at the dawn of the photographic age.

The dynamic materiality of the daguerreotype constructed a sense of active vision, a near-haptic experience. To look at one means moving one's body to find the right viewing angle, peering to establish the precise position for the seeming hologram to resolve into a complete picture for the eye. With the Zealy daguerreotypes, such an experience can give one "an intense sensation of being a peeping Tom," as legal scholar Yxta Maya Murray recounted about her experience with the Zealy daguerreotypes at the Peabody Museum in her essay on Weems's appropriation of the images for her tondo. The drama of viewing increased when Murray saw her own face in the reflective surface, as she put it, "so that I appeared simultaneously to be looking over Jack or Drana's shoulder or blotting out their features with my own."<sup>19</sup>

The practice of sustained viewing continued as meditating on pictures—from the daguerreotype to the ambrotype to, eventually, the carte-de-visite—began to constitute a social ritual, a collective activity because of the habitual viewing of photographs in parlor albums. Modeled on documents of sacred worship—psalm books, hymnals, and the Bible—albums became documents through which to meditate not only on one’s own family, but also on the human family.<sup>20</sup> This social ritual became a time for inner rumination, which included the ideas of society and the boundary line between races.

The system of disrobing also emerges as a key feature in Agassiz’s 1865 photography project in Manaus, Brazil, as a means of showing racial difference in a society vastly different from the U.S. and with more mutable racial boundaries. There he created a putative “photographic saloon,” as Christoph Irmscher aptly states, in which bodies were marked by full and partial undress.<sup>21</sup> The main purpose of these photographs in Brazil, the location of Agassiz’s fossil fish study for his dissertation, was to take images of black and indigenous subjects in a narrative sequence, showing his sitters as fully clothed and then disrobed as part of his study of humankind. We learn about this key feature of disrobing from William James, who went to work for Agassiz as an assistant in Manaus while he was still a student at Harvard College. James entered the “saloon” and commented that Agassiz physically handled his alternately clothed and then disrobed sitters, taking “the utmost liberties” with them.<sup>22</sup> In one image, it appears that part of Agassiz’s own body—clothed in white, with one hand extended—is in a position of near-medical assessment, and he was present for these photographic sessions (see fig. 7.29). Irmscher notes that Agassiz would have known about the work of the French photographer Édouard Thiesson, who in 1844 had photographed a woman from Brazil in this half-dressed state. The scientists Thomas Henry Huxley and John Lamprey would also create a system of anthropometry, a systemized method that used photographs to create and distribute standardized photometric methods for the purpose of racial science. All subjects were photographed naked, according to established cephalic and somatic poses, and were accompanied by a measuring scale to create two full-length photographs: one frontal, the other in profile. The cellular grid turned photography into a tool of measurement, which later translated into a template for assessing normalcy and so-called deviance in the context of crime.<sup>23</sup>

An example of how ideas about nakedness and nudity were evolving in American art at this time, through the template of the partial disrobing, is encapsulated in the controversy over the Boston-based sculptor Horatio Greenough’s 1841 statue of George Washington as being inappropriately dressed. Sculpted in marble, Washington appeared seated, his torso bare, with a toga coming up to his waist and his right hand raised to approximate the senatorial *adlocutio* posture meant to refer to the statesman addressing

his citizens; it was also unveiled at a time when that physical template was beginning to be used to define racial strata in American life. Vivien Green Fryd's research on the history of this statue—which was meant for the rotunda of the U.S. Capitol but was moved, two years later, to a less prominent position on the grounds and was finally sent to the Smithsonian Museum, where it remains today—centers on the public outrage that this posture of half-dress created.<sup>24</sup> Congressman Henry A. Wise was not alone in his outrage over the “naked statue of George Washington” and admitted that while “it might possibly suit modern taste,” it was not suitable for American taste.<sup>25</sup> While the scholarship on this statue has not been connected to the history of racial science explicitly, it was part of the constellation of compositional templates burgeoning in the national discourse about visual emblems of racial whiteness and selfhood that were being tested at that time.

When Zealy's studio embarked on this project for Agassiz, the pictorial gesture of uncloaking was a symbolic cue that transformed a work of art into evidence for natural science. There is no conclusive evidence, to my knowledge, that Zealy received direction from Agassiz to use this template of half dress. However, Agassiz's Brazilian photographic project suggests that it is possible. As Zealy's photographs were taken in 1850, this form of the insistent reveal was not yet codified, and clothing revealed to be artifice through the state of partial undress was becoming a compositional device to turn images into data. This occurred alongside the legal regulation of clothing as a key mode of defining societal hierarchies during and after the abolition of slavery. Here, one could also look at the influence of Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*, a genre-defying text that was influential in both Britain and America—specifically Boston—in the 1830s and 1840s, whose title translates loosely as “Tailor Retailored.” It not only considered how cloth constituted a kind of emblem for social status, but also functioned as a critique of European philosophy.<sup>26</sup> The opening to “Book I, Clothes” introduces the reader to Carlyle's meditation on clothing as “the site and materials whereon and whereby . . . a Person, is to be built,” arguing that the fabric-based material world created symbols of the spiritual world.<sup>27</sup> The text opens up the site of clothing as the underdeveloped discursive space in the history of photography and racial science. Douglass's own attentiveness to clothing in both public engagements and photographs is an example here as a form of fashioning selfhood. Agassiz, too, noted with some bewilderment and concern in a letter to his mother, Rose Mayor Agassiz, that clothing in America was a social leveler such that “everyone, down to the humblest worker . . . will don a clean linen shirt just to attend a meeting in which the establishment of a new library is discussed.”<sup>28</sup> Agassiz's method of penetrating sight for the purpose of classification would require exposing clothing as artifice.

It was also through pictorial compositions from the antebellum period that clothing became a conceptual symbol to signal societal stratification for



**Figure 11.4.**  
Charles Willson Peale, *The Artist in His Museum*, 1822. Oil on canvas

natural science. The influential American scientist, painter, patriot, and naturalist Charles Willson Peale exemplified this connection with his landmark painting *The Artist in His Museum* (1822) (fig. 11.4). In the center of the composition, Peale draws up a curtain, exposing an ordered set of objects from the natural world from his pioneering expeditions, and the collection that would become the Peale's Philadelphia Museum. The three objects that comprise the origins of his collection were his portraits of evolutionary worthies, a dried paddlefish, and the bones of the mammoth, to which he gestures with his left hand. The mammoth bones—which he found by excavating layers of earth—were seen as a statement about the superiority of America over Europe, which had been the subject of a long-standing debate between Thomas Jefferson and Georges-Louis Leclerc, Comte de Buffon.<sup>29</sup> Here, Peale's centralized, unfurling gesture evokes the role of unclinking in natural science as a whole. He wrote in his unpublished manuscript that the position put him “in the attitude of lifting up a curtain to shew [*sic*] the Museum—emblematical that he had given to his country a sight of nature history in his labours to form a Museum.”<sup>30</sup> What Peale's painting shows is the collection created by the first natural history museum in America. George Washington, John Adams, and Thomas Jefferson were the first members of the museum when it opened to the public in 1802. The collection was organized using Linnaean taxonomy, with names written in Latin, English, and French.



Figure 11.5.  
Charles Willson Peale and Titian Ramsay  
Peale, *The Long Room, Interior of Front  
Room in Peale's Museum*, 1822. Watercolor  
over graphite pencil on paper

Peale described Carl Linnaeus's contribution as having “opened the book of nature,” precisely the action that his composition aims to convey, theatrically pulling back a velvet red cloth on the stage of the “drama of historic time.”<sup>31</sup>

Compositionally central to Peale's painting *The Artist in His Museum* are two modes of vision crucial to natural science—awestruck wonder and an insistent gaze. In the middleground is a woman with her hands up in an alarmed state—her body a physical display of her astonishment, while, behind her, a father and son stare at the collection.<sup>32</sup> Peale has positioned all of these gazes directly beneath his raised hand, cueing the viewer that natural science requires attentive observation. His painting did not need to lend this much compositional space to the theatrical gesture. He and his son Titian Ramsay Peale had painted a watercolor of the museum's Long Room that shows what the curtain hides in *The Artist in His Museum*: windows dotting a display of statuary and cabinets of specimens (fig. 11.5). Yet, for the oil painting, Charles Willson Peale eliminated this window to include the red velvet curtain and his own instructional pose in order to create a more dramatic rendering of this space.

Audiences could have read this gesture of sartorial unfurling in pictorial representation as an invitation to engage with natural science, just as they did when viewing the 1802 admission ticket for Peale's Museum, replete





Figure 11.6.  
Charles Willson Peale, *Portrait of Yarrow Mamout (Muhammad Yaro)*, 1819. Oil on canvas



Figure 11.7.  
Harriet Cany Peale, *Her Mistress's Clothes*, 1848. Oil on panel

with this splaying gesture, conveyed by an opened scroll with the words “explore the wondrous work” and pictures of objects of natural history, including crustaceans, birds, and more.<sup>33</sup> The symbol of disrobing as a signal of discovery was one with which the public was familiar.<sup>34</sup>

In the pre-photographic history of image making, registering racial difference occurred through the conventions of representation and dress. Consider Peale’s use of sartorial display to document racial hierarchy in his 1819 *Portrait of Yarrow Mamout (Muhammad Yaro)*, which depicts a Guinea-born formerly enslaved man (fig. 11.6). It is one of the earliest portraits of an African American subject in American art, along with John Singleton Copley’s *Head of a Negro* (1777–78)—a possible study for his painting *Watson and the Shark* (1775–78)—and therefore shows us early compositional attempts to signal racial difference. Peale included it in a sixty-six-foot-long skylighted gallery next to his portraits of figures from Thomas Jefferson to Benjamin Franklin in the natural history museum. In Peale’s twenty-four-by-twenty-inch portrait, he portrays Yarrow in a bewildering abundance of ill-fitting clothing, particularly when compared with any of his portraits of white sitters. Yarrow is dressed in jacket upon jacket with a button undone, as if to show his largesse, to convey a grandeur that cannot be contained. He was celebrated for his unusual longevity (he was reportedly 134 years old upon his death, though he was more likely in his eighties), his Muslim faith

(Mamout being a variant on Muhammad), and his wealth, having amassed a fortune in Washington, D.C., where he lived after being manumitted in Maryland.

The insistent cloaking of Yarrow—he appears sunken in his jackets, shrinking underneath his knit cap—signals self-ownership through excess sartorial possessions. His jacket collar is also askew, with one tip pointing upward and the other downward, as if to insist on a transitional status, here the one from slavery to sovereignty that gave Yarrow such acclaim. Despite becoming known for what then would have been seen as his improbable wealth, his clothing and fabric do not appear refined, as they do in portraits of free-born, well-off African Americans from the same time period, such as Franklin R. Street’s 1841 paintings of Hiram Charles and Elizabeth Brown Montier, a prominent couple from the Philadelphia community.

A painting by Peale’s daughter-in-law Harriet Cany Peale further emphasized how clothing in visual representation, coupled with gestures of violence, helped to sustain the ideology of racial hierarchies, even in American art. In *Her Mistress’s Clothes* (1848), Cany Peale, then married to Peale’s son Rembrandt Peale, renders a black woman dressed and adorned in an elaborate style underscored by her ensemble’s golden tones, which suffuse the composition (fig. 11.7). To complete the look of her high-waisted empire gown, she wears a complete set of cameo-styled jewelry: earrings, a three-strand cameo necklace, and an inch-wide armband. Cany Peale had knowledge of women’s fashion and propriety from her prior work in a “fancy-goods” business in Philadelphia. She kept up with the styles, passing along notes to her niece in Cincinnati, and would have known that a neoclassical costume characteristic of the 1810s was out of style by 1848, making this an image of ridicule.

Cany Peale’s painting was, in this sense, not just a copy of the circa 1803 French school watercolor “*Look, what a beautiful little face!*” The title’s double valence speaks both to the action in the composition—the black woman being coerced to look—and the menacing control, denigration, and subjugation of black bodies through social practices naturalized through transatlantic slavery.<sup>35</sup> In the work, we see a white hand underneath a black chin with a splay of the fingers suggestive of a gesture somewhere between guiding and strangling that prompts an interrogative gaze. As Elizabeth O’Leary writes in her study of this painting, the effect goes beyond one of “white dominance” and creates an “inadvertent allusion to black captivity by draping the servant in a chain of golden cameos.”<sup>36</sup> It is an effect made more chilling by the mistress’s gesture, one more appropriate for a doll. The mistress’s white arm emerges between the two figures under the black woman’s chin to force her head to the mirror. Yet through clothing and gesture, the white woman and black woman form a tightly bound comparative pair. Their neck ornaments touch, their hair rests against each other’s as if to suggest their interdependent fates—the status of one ensured the

status of the other. This is not an example of the subversive practice of the enslaved imitating the culture of their masters and mistresses, as theorized by the scholars James Sidbury and Joseph Roach.<sup>37</sup> Instead, we have a black body that has been “dressed up,” in what are presumably “her mistress’s clothes,” and held in a posture that naturalizes the chilling coercion required to maintain the hierarchy of racial categories and the transformation of subjects into objects.

Cany Peale’s painting contextually recalls that sumptuary laws regulated even the type of fabric that the enslaved could receive and wear as a means of maintaining social order. Louisiana’s sumptuary laws, for example, forbade the use of high-quality textiles in clothing for the enslaved, while South Carolina’s Negro Act of 1735 laid out perhaps the most legally specific restrictions. This act limited “any sort of garment or apparel whatsoever” worn by the enslaved from being “finer, other or of greater value than Negro cloth, duffels, coarse kerseys, osnabrigs, blue linen, check linen, or coarse garlix, calicoes, checked cottons or Scottish plaids.”<sup>38</sup>

After emancipation, the legislation of clothing through the Black Codes continued to regulate black bodies. The Freedmen’s Bureau (the Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands), created by Congress in 1865, detailed the post-emancipation “indenture of apprenticeship” contracts between the newly freed and their employers, many of which made explicit the offer or withholding of clothing. The archive from the years between 1865 and 1872 reveals the extent to which withholding clothing became a form of punishment for the formerly enslaved. As one example, a formerly enslaved woman named Thuresa Duffies testified that she fled a plantation one mile from Frederick City in Maryland after being “beat and braised” by her owner, George Williams, when slavery was abolished; she landed in jail when she complained of her mistreatment. When Williams came to release her from jail, he forced her to either leave Maryland or return to the plantation. While she did initially leave, she later returned to Maryland for her children, only to have Williams refuse to return her clothing, as retribution. The Freedmen’s Bureau report affirms that “her former master kept all her clothes and household goods worth about \$120.”<sup>39</sup>

The clothing worn by Delia and Drana in Zealy’s daguerreotypes was made of embroidered cloth and, as records indicate, could have been the product of enslaved labor. Delia and Drana were from the Taylor plantation, which had a tailor, Holland, who by 1852 was given the third highest value on the plantation behind the carpenter and the cook, who were both valued at \$1,000. Six years later, Holland was rented out when the estate was being settled, as his value had increased to \$1,300.<sup>40</sup> Could Holland, who was bought because of his tailoring skills in the 1830s, have made the dresses worn by Delia and Drana? On many plantations enslaved men became tailors, as the historian Brenda Stevenson has shown—my own ancestors in North Carolina included.

It is important to emphasize here what the Freedmen's Bureau records also reveal—that the forcible removal of black women's clothing was a form of violent retribution. This essay will not rehash the vivid, horrific template of the violence and sexual assault that continued from slavery and was perpetrated against black women, but the bureau's archive is filled with reports of women having had their clothes partially stripped off, thrown above their heads and waists before an assault as punishment for having asserted agency in the face of impending sexual violence. Suffice it to say that Duffies, in recounting the withholding of clothes as punishment for claiming her children, reported that she was not only "beaten" but "braised." This term suggests a searing breaking of the body and reminds us of the effect of this stripping—to turn a body into a thing, a specimen, an object.

The index of ownership that allowed this stripping and its attendant violence is what gives the Zealy daguerreotypes such tension. They are compelling, in part, because of their haptic quality. This is not only because the daguerreotypes can be touched, but because the gesture of uncloaking reminds us that these sitters, too, were once touched.

It is not clear when the enslaved subjects in Zealy's daguerreotypes were told to disrobe upon entering his studio. The curator Melissa Banta surmises that "seven slaves were . . . ordered to disrobe" after being led into "Zealy's elegant daguerreian parlor."<sup>41</sup> Scholar Harvey Young maintains that the partial undress of each figure renders it likely that there was an individualized order, with directions "issued in the moments immediately preceding their performance of stillness and not all at once."<sup>42</sup> The result, regardless of the timing of the directions, creates a scene that would be familiar for racial science—subjects forcibly stripped.

Might Zealy, as a student of photography, have known of the conventions of disrobing that formed this nexus of painting, representation, and natural science? Certainly Agassiz, arguably the coauthor of the commissioned daguerreotypes, would have also been familiar with the compositional gesture of control and uncloaking through his intimate study of the naturalist, zoologist, and father of paleontology Georges Cuvier. Cuvier had studied and then dissected the body of Sara Baartman, the "Hottentot Venus," before her remains went on display at the Musée de l'Homme in Paris, the afterlife of her presentation as the subject of one of the most famous and notorious ethnological displays of the nineteenth century.<sup>43</sup> Agassiz considered himself Cuvier's "intellectual heir."<sup>44</sup> While this essay cannot recount the full history of this display and her body's afterlife, it is important to note that the gesture of uncloaking was a critical feature in the spectacle made of Baartman, such that even in the advertising of her display, as Zoë Strother notes, there were often two modes of pictorial staging: The first showed the likeness of the performer "what they will actually see," and the other depicted "*how to interpret what they see.*"<sup>45</sup> One

referenced how she appeared in her performance, while the other showed her undressed, with the curve of her buttocks on full display. The later pose was not the way she stood on stage, but instead cued the audience to view the show in the context of racial science.

One of the functions of the gesture of stripping a body of clothing in the context of slavery and colonialism, and the attendant complex of photography and spectacles, was to naturalize the system that owned the reproductive potential of black bodies as part of their enslaved labor. As historian Jennifer Morgan argues in her pioneering study *Laboring Women*, foregrounding sexuality and reproduction as a means of coercion and control during slavery—the ability to claim fertility as part of an enslaved woman’s labor, not as protected by her union with her partner—was conditioned on “outrageous images and callously indifferent strategies to ultimately inscribe enslaved women as racially and culturally different.”<sup>46</sup> This was precisely the sort of treatment endured by enslaved women at the time of Zealy’s daguerreotypes. The control over the bodies and the reproductive labor of black women is a foundational moment in the history of reproductive justice—challenging the commodification of black reproduction—and is vital for creating the presumptive visual access to the seminude black female form.<sup>47</sup>



I have argued that the gesture of forcible disclosure through materials in Zealy’s daguerreotypes was a critical sign that alerted the mind to read these bodies with an anthropological eye for the project of racial science. Yet was it an effective, enduring one in the American context? Does the mutability of this gesture, used in abolitionist images, hint at the fragile foundations of the project of scientific racism and constitute part of what led to the daguerreotypes never being published? Is this feature what contributed to the pictures being seen, as Molly Rogers’s study of Zealy’s daguerreotypes argues, as difficult to function as authoritative objects in support of polygenesis?<sup>48</sup>

A few years after Zealy took these daguerreotypes, Frederick Douglass argued that pictures once used “to read the negro out of the human family” by racial science could be subversively used to argue for rights and citizenship.<sup>49</sup> In 1861, Douglass would first elaborate on his sense of the dynamic role of pictures for racial reconciliation in his speech “Pictures and Progress,” delivered in Boston’s Tremont Temple—the integrated church on Boston Common, one block from where he had delivered a commemorative address on the anniversary of John Brown’s execution. He argued that combat might end complete sectional disunion, but something often overlooked—namely, pictures—would be crucial for America’s progress and racial reconciliation.

In this speech, he focused on the critical role of what some might consider irrelevant in the face of a nation-severing conflict: pictures and the



Figure 11.8. Engraver unknown, *Scenes Daily and Hourly Acting under the Shadow of American Law*, in Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*; or, *Negro Life in the Slave States of America: With Fifty Splendid Engravings*, 1852. Engraving



Figure 11.9. George Cruikshank, *Persecuted Virtue*, in Harriet Beecher Stowe, *Uncle Tom's Cabin*, 1852. Engraving

images that they could conjure in the critical imagination. Douglass, the most photographed American man in the nineteenth century, as scholarship by John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier have shown, described the “whole soul of man,” when “rightly viewed,” as “a sort of picture gallery[,] a grand panorama.”<sup>50</sup> The inward “picture making faculty,” Douglass argued, was what permits us to accurately see the “picture of life contrasted with the fact of life” or the “ideal contrasted with the real.”<sup>51</sup> An encounter with pictures, Douglass observed, could ignite a new inner vision of life and civic society. Just as images had served to reify racial boundaries, Douglass suggested, they could also undo them.

Around the same time that Agassiz came into possession of the Zealy daguerreotypes to reinforce his own ideas of racial inequality, pictures of black women and men in states of partial undress were becoming more tightly associated with abolitionism and emancipation (figs. 11.8 and 11.9). On either side of the Atlantic, an image of a half-dressed enslaved black woman ran on the cover of Harriet Beecher Stowe’s *Uncle Tom’s Cabin*, published in 1852 in London, as if a recapitulation of the visual currency of the



Figure 11.10.  
Artist unknown, *Sojourner Truth*  
(ca. 1797–1883), 1864. Albumen  
silver print on card

abolitionist emblem of a supplicant, half-dressed enslaved man by Josiah Wedgwood. On the cover of Stowe’s novel, in the C. H. Clark and Co. edition, the woman appears as though she is about to be whipped—her mouth is agape, her body rendered as if curved over in a protective stance from the impending lash raised mid-air, her hands bound—which prompted Stowe to write to her publishers to complain about its graphic nature. She had aimed to distinguish *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* from other abolitionist books by replacing depictions of violence with, as she wrote to her publisher, “those thousand worse tortures which slavery inflicts on the *soul*.”<sup>52</sup>

Eight years after Zealy took these photographs, Sojourner Truth (fig. 11.10) consciously challenged the associations of the insistent display when in 1858 she disrobed herself to a viewing audience at an antislavery meeting in Indiana. Her presence was enough of a draw not only to convene the meeting, but also to captivate the crowd. She spoke without interruption, yet, at the end, a group of Democrats—largely slavery sympathizers led by T. W. Strain—questioned her authenticity as a woman. Truth had stood accused of being a man, an attack meant to invalidate her message by “exposing her as a sexual imposter.”<sup>53</sup> The group of men asked Truth to show her breasts to the women in the room who would report back to them and confirm her sex.

The antislavery meeting could not adjourn without acknowledging this coercive, debasing request that Truth, like Delia and Drana, show herself disrobed. At first, Truth's retort and undress seemed to unman her accusers through the accusation of infantilism alone. "She quietly asked them, as she disrobed her bosom, if they, too, wished to suck!" the *Liberator* reported. "In vindication of her truthfulness, she told them that she would show her breast to the whole congregation; that it was not to her shame that she uncovered her breast before them, but to their shame." Historian Nell Painter describes the disrobing as a challenge to the indexes of American manhood in her biography on Truth. Truth reminded the men that "her breasts had suckled many a white babe, to the exclusion of her own offspring" and that those babies "were, in her estimation, far more manly than they (her persecutors) appeared to be."<sup>54</sup>

Truth's act reveals that she read the insistent call for her disrobement not as mere impertinence, but as an opportunity for what Painter has called "embodied rhetoric."<sup>55</sup> Her retort hinged on her decision to address the men, passing over the white women to whom she was directed to unveil herself. This allowed her actions to potently reverse the commonly held associations with her half-dressed state; Truth used a posture meant to denigrate, performed at the hands of white men, as a reclamation of agency. She had linked the event not only with the staging of slave auctions and the state of undressed women and men there, but with the visual challenges to this figurative gesture of scientific racism.

One might here ask why it would occur to Truth to create this semiotic display as a way to upend the power dynamic in the room. We could see her understanding of the efficacy of photography for subversion couched in this concept of unveiling through the decision to include the text "I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance" at the bottom of her commercially sold cartes-de-visite.<sup>56</sup> As Painter has argued, Truth carefully and dynamically used dress in her portraits in the 1860s as a symbol of her position—moving from the Quaker style of dress to one showing her knitting, covered with a knit shawl in the posture of a middle-class matron, and often with other items such as books. Like Douglass, Truth not only was aware of the physical compositional templates used to create counternarratives that would honor African American lives, but also was engaged in the dynamism of reversals, bodily refusals, and strategic reveals.

Abolitionists would also use partially disrobed black male bodies to display evidence of the nearly unimaginable abuse and inhumanity of slavery. By 1863, the carte-de-visite of a man often referred to alternatively as Peter or Gordon, shown in a copy of the original image by the photographer Mathew Brady's studio, became an emblematic image for this changing relationship between photography, slavery, and disrobing as a form of evidence for the brutality of the peculiar institution (fig. 11.11). Abolitionists distributed this image, which centers on a newly free man in a state of





Figure 11.11.  
Mathew Brady Studio, after William  
D. McPherson and Mr. Oliver, *Gordon*,  
1863. Albumen silver print

half-dress, his shirt bunched at his waist to expose what became known as “The Scourged Back,” his skin covered with visible, raised keloid marks that bore traces of the whippings he had endured. It is a picture that, the *New York Independent* commented at the time, “tells the story in a way that even Mrs. Stowe can not [*sic*] approach, because it tells the story to the eye.”<sup>57</sup> For all of the attention paid in scholarship to the use of presenting the wounded black body in the context of abolition, it must be emphasized that this corporeal reveal was visualized and framed through a state of half-dress. The wounds were not isolated, but strategically photographed in order to remind the viewer of the enslaved subject’s agency to showcase his own body, a means of restored empowerment.<sup>58</sup>

On July 4, 1863, *Harper’s Weekly* published a triptych with the gesture of partial disrobing linked to presenting a body for visual study (fig. 11.12). The name of this man was disputed; Vincent Colyer, the likely illustrator, would later claim that the figure often known as Gordon was, in fact, Furney Bryant, an enslaved man from North Carolina, “who came within our lines dressed in the rags of the plantation.”<sup>59</sup> Later, another source maintained that Gordon was, in fact, “Peter” who had escaped to Union lines in Baton Rouge, Louisiana. Colyer recounts how he conveyed his enslaved past, recalling that he “pulled down the pile of dirty rags that half



Figure 11.12.  
 “A Typical Negro,” in *Harper’s Weekly*, July 4, 1863

concealed his back, and which was once a shirt and exhibited his mutilated sable form to the crowd of officers and others present in the office.”<sup>60</sup> The *Harper’s Weekly* layout used this posture in a triptych as an emblem of an enslaved man before he took up arms and clothing—a uniform that would function as a new form of resistance for abolitionists. A posture that was meant to turn a subject into an object and piece of evidence for polygenesis now served an epiphanic function as evidence of near-unimaginable abuse in order to physicalize the inhumanity of slavery. As Painter points out, when Susan B. Anthony held up images to raise money at a Women’s National Loyal League meeting, one was of Gordon and the other was of Sojourner Truth.<sup>61</sup>



Is there a connection between the forcible disrobing of scientific racism and, decades later, the assertions of dignity through sartorial display that would become central to the New Negro movement? This racial project at the turn of the twentieth century underscored the burgeoning “politics of

respectability,” as historian Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham has adroitly called this tactic used by African Americans, and was the “weapon” of choice against the visual and performative cultural denigration by racist constructions.<sup>62</sup> “*A New Negro* clearly intended to ‘turn’ the new century’s image of the black away from the stereotypes scattered throughout plantation fictions, blackface minstrelsy, vaudeville, racist pseudoscience, and vulgar Social Darwinism. The task was an enormous one,” historian Henry Louis Gates, Jr., has argued. “The Public Negro Self, therefore, was an entity to be crafted.”<sup>63</sup> Choices regarding sartorial arrangements, hairstyles, and general forms of self-care went beyond material and quotidian concerns and became tools for rejecting “Social Darwinist explanations of blacks’ biological inferiority to whites”—clothing and material covering transformed into political utterances, another form of “embodied rhetoric.”<sup>64</sup>

Was it the known symbolism of dress (and undress) for African American life that made Winslow Homer take particular note of the desired presentational intentions of the African American subjects in his 1877 painting *Dressing for the Carnival* (fig. 11.13)? In the nineteenth century, Homer’s humanizing images of African Americans amid a sea of racist caricatures were so singular that Alain Locke remarked in 1940 that “Homer is chiefly responsible for the modern revival of interest in the Negro subject.”<sup>65</sup>



**Figure 11.13.**  
Winslow Homer, *Dressing for the Carnival*, 1877. Oil on canvas

G. W. Sheldon concluded his 1878 account of the painter's work in the *Art Journal* with the statement that "his negro studies, recently brought from Virginia, are in several respects—in their total freedom from conventionalism and mannerism . . . the most successful things of the kind that this country has yet produced."<sup>66</sup>

In *Dressing for the Carnival*, Homer foregrounds six attendant young African American children gazing at a man being clothed in an outfit of red, yellow, blue, and white by two women flanking him, gathered outdoors in a field in front of a fence and quarters. Homer has caught the man looking down in the midst of buttoning his shirt as he is being fitted for a costume for the African ceremony of Jonkonnu on Independence Day after emancipation. Thomas B. Clarke, who acquired the painting in 1892, included a note about Homer's awareness of the power of this nexus of African American identity and sartorial pride: "The negroes had taken offense . . . at the studies he made of them, for his models were generally poorly clad . . . by way of re-establishing himself in their favor, he painted this canvas, in which he represented a group of negroes . . . in costumes of many colors, to their entire satisfaction."<sup>67</sup> What is most curious about this composition is Homer's decision to paint his figures in the act of being clothed. It offers the viewers a sense of witnessing African Americans as having an active role in their self-definition during a period in which dress was regulated through the Black Codes. In Homer's composition, the most pronounced figurative gesture is that of the woman in the gray dress who is tailoring the man's multihued ensemble, her string stretched over the extent of her frame, her hand holding the thread taut as she stands with a determined countenance that suggests her engagement with serious work. The painting offers testimony about the loaded racial signifier that dressing according to one's own desires had become an act of defiance and insistence on the subjects' own humanity.

At the turn of the twentieth century, the residue of the tie between the insistent reveal and racial classification would continue, even entering the courtroom as a residual posture of racial evidence. In the famous 1925 *Rhinelander v. Rhinelander* case in New York state, Leonard Rhinelander had sued his wife, Alice Jones, on the grounds that she lied about being a white woman when she had black ancestry, an accusation about racial passing made more unusual because New York did not prohibit interracial marriage. Coerced partial exposure became the central evidence in the court proceedings—Jones was forced into "unveiling . . . parts of the body unexposed to sunlight," as the historian Elizabeth M. Smith-Pryor recounts.<sup>68</sup> Images alone were not enough to offer proof of Rhinelander's cognizance of his wife's mixed-race status. Taken with his camera, Rhinelander's own photographs of Jones in an intimate pose—lying in a nightgown with a plunging neckline, in a hotel-room bed before they were married—were unpersuasive forms of evidence. To prove that she was not white, the

photographs of his wife had to be married to something more—an interrogative gaze through the act of uncloaking.

In the *Rhineland v. Rhineland* trial, the jury room became the site of an uncanny update to the photography studio in terms of its role in the enduring project of racial science. (The courtroom was deemed too public and, hence, embarrassing as a location for the unveiling, so they settled on the jury room.) The court stenographer recounted that Jones went to the lavatory and returned, “weeping,” wearing only underwear and a long coat which she let down at her lawyer’s direction. As if a twentieth-century Delia or Drana, there Jones sat, “the upper portion of her body, as far down as the breast was exposed.” She then was instructed to show the jury her legs up to the knee. The justices, the attorneys, the stenographer, the jury, and her husband all took part in the virtual display. Like Drana and Delia, Jones turned from subject to object through a forcible presentation of her half-naked body; Justice Joseph Morschauer insisted on calling her body “it” several times during the case.<sup>69</sup> Jones’s lawyer admitted her unrobed body parts into evidence—principally “her upper body and lower limbs,” areas that were less affected by sunlight and therefore closer to her natural state—to prove that her race was undeniable in private even if obscured in public. This act of coerced undressing, and specifically partial undress, was a continuation of the precise visual language of race and property that was on display in Zealy’s photographs from more than a century earlier.<sup>70</sup>

Jones was “partly disrobed,” stated the report by many outlets, including the *New York Evening Standard*, which ran an image that depicted what differentiated the act from being solely a display of nakedness—the directive to partially undress. In the image, Lee Parsons Davis, Jones’s lawyer, points directly at her, his arm a horizontal line, a conceptual ruler that marks the boundary between a portrait of nudity and one of an insistent gaze. While no photographers were allowed in the courtroom, newspapers ran photo-collages to replicate the act of partial disrobing. The *New York Evening Graphic* ran a composograph, a composite of actual photographs affixed to staged bodies—a strategy apparent in the attendees’ illogical gazes, which are averted from Jones and toward the corners of the room, perhaps in a presentation of a wished-for measure of decency. Jones is shown with one hand covering her face and the other arm covering her breasts, with the armhole of her slip resting on her hip (fig. 11.14).

Through their afterlife in the hands of Weems, as a precursor to a reoccurring template that emerged even in legal cases such as the *Rhineland* trial, we can see the images of Delia, Drana, Jack, and Renty as indexical of the struggle to transform images into compositional data that could both conform to and confound the classifying project of racial science. It is fitting that, in the end, Zealy’s daguerreotypes of enslaved men and women needed to be forcibly uncloaked by Weems to be brought



Figure 11.14.  
Harry Grogin, *Alice Disrobes in Court to Keep  
Her Husband*. Composite photograph from the  
*New York Evening Graphic*, November 25, 1925

to light, setting the discursive stage to consider how partial undress is evidence of the attempt to legitimate racial hierarchies for image construction in the service of racial stratification. The developments in American art, from works by Charles Willson Peale, Harriet Cany Peale, and Horatio Greenough to key abolitionist images and Sojourner Truth's declamatory act all comprise a vast set of forces that converged to both support and challenge the conceptual logic of half-dress as a marker of the discourse of natural science. The afterlife of the Zealy images—their extended temporality—has, over time, given them a sense of doubling; they capture an attempt at codifying a photographic method for the purpose of racial science, but now they also function as a portrait of the forcible methods of the “American school” of ethnology and hint at the fragile construction of theories meant to harden fictions into facts about a hierarchy of humankind. The mutable and unstable revelatory use of photographs for racial science—first denigrating, then productively destabilizing in the context of American abolitionist history—was, perhaps, part of what Douglass had in mind when he made his case for these images as affecting objects: they catalyzed a mental reconsideration of the surrounding world, and of the very racial ideology that they were meant to prove.

## Notes

1. Yxta Maya Murray wrote about this extensively in “From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried: Carrie Mae Weems’ Challenge to the Harvard Archive,” *8 Unbound: Harvard Journal of the Legal Left*, no. 1 (2013), pp. 1–78 (Loyola–LA Legal Studies Paper, no. 2013-31). Carrie Mae Weems discusses her response to Harvard University in the *Art 21* episode “Compassion”: see William Kentridge, Doris Salcedo, and Carrie Mae Weems, “Compassion,” *Art in the Twenty-First Century*, season 5, episode 2, 2009, <https://art21.org/watch/art-in-the-twenty-first-century/s5/carrie-mae-weems-in-compassion-segment/>. See also Ilisa Barbash, “Exposing Latent Images: Daguerreotypes in the Museum and Beyond,” chap. 13, this vol.
2. I am grateful for the exchanges that came from the Radcliffe Institute for Advanced Study Academic Ventures workshop, hosted by Ilisa Barbash and John Stauffer, which gathered a range of scholars, including Robin Bernstein, Matthew Fox-Amato, Harlan Greene, Gregg Hecimovich, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, Christoph Irmscher, Molly Rogers, Tanya Sheehan, Manisha Sinha, Deborah Willis, and John Wood, all of whom offered feedback that made this paper a pleasure to develop. My thanks go as well to Jean Comaroff, John L. Comaroff, Evelynnn Hammonds, Richard Powell, Jennifer Roberts, and Tommie Shelby for their comments, suggestions, and generosity. See Mario Perniola, “Between Clothing and Nudity,” in *Fragments for a History of the Human Body, Part 2*, Michel Feher, Ramona Naddaff, and Nadiz Tazi, eds. (New York: Zone Books, 1989), pp. 236–65; and Ludmilla Jordanova, *Sexual Visions: Images of Gender in Science and Medicine between the Eighteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Milwaukee: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989).
3. Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002), p. 23.
4. For an extended discussion of the strategic use of text to interrogate the framing of black bodies in the history of racial science in Carrie Mae Weems’s series, see Kimberly Juanita Brown, “Photographic Incantations of the Visual,” in her book *The Repeating Body: Slavery’s Visual Resonance in the Contemporary* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2015), pp. 177–94; Erina Duganne, “Family Folktales: Carrie Mae Weems, Allan Sekula, and the Critique of Documentary Photography,” *English Language Notes* 49, no. 2 (Winter 2011), pp. 41–52; and Deborah Willis, “Photographing between the Lines: Beauty, Politics, and the Poetic Vision of Carrie Mae Weems,” in *Carrie Mae Weems: Three Decades of Photography and Video*, Kathryn E. Delmez, ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2012), pp. 33–41. For an extended discussion of Weems’s engagement with the Zealy daguerreotypes for her series, see Brian Wallis, “Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz’s Slave Daguerreotypes,” *American Art* 9, no. 2 (Summer 1995), pp. 38–61; and Nicholas Mirzoeff, “The Shadow and the Substance: Race, Photography, and the Index,” in *Only Skin Deep: Changing Visions of the American Self*, Coco Fusco and Brian Wallis, eds. (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 2003), pp. 163–81.
5. Quoted in Murray, “From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried,” p. 24.
6. This development is part of the broad topic of conceptual iconoclasm in the period of American slavery. See Jennifer Van Horn, “‘The Dark Iconoclast’: African Americans’ Artistic Resistance in the Civil War South,” *Art Bulletin* 99, no. 4 (2017), pp. 133–67. It is also part of a history of critique of racial science by African American cultural producers in the nineteenth century, as argued by Britt Rusert in *Fugitive Science: Empiricism and Freedom in Early African American Culture* (New York: New York University Press, 2017).
7. See Jean Comaroff and John L. Comaroff, “Fashioning the Colonial Subject: The Emperor’s Old Clothes,” in *Of Revelation and Revolution, Volume 2: The Dialectics of Modernity on a South African Frontier* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp. 218–73. For more on black female slave dressing in Canada, see Charmaine A. Nelson, *Representing the Black Female Subject in Western Art* (New York: Routledge, 2010).
8. Here one could draw parallels between the idea of clothing, the reveal in Malek Alloula’s theorization of the veil, and cloaking in the context of Orientalism as a form of resistance to the colonial gaze. The space of photography, constructed to convey a sense of “feigned realism,” Alloula argued, became a space of unveiling in postcards sent largely by the French in Algeria from 1900 to 1930, as part of a probing fantasy linked to the imperialist colonial project. See Malek Alloula, *The Colonial Harem*, trans. Myrna Godzich (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), pp. 13, 18. Also see Mary Roberts, *Intimate Outsiders: The Harem in Ottoman and Orientalist Art and Travel Literature* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2007).
9. See Elizabeth Edwards, *Anthropology and Photography* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992); Kathleen Stewart Howe, *First Seen: Portraits of the World’s Peoples, 1840–1880* (Santa Barbara, Calif.: Santa Barbara Museum of Art, 2004); Stephen Jay Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1981; repr. 2006); William Stanton, *The Leopard’s Spots: Scientific Attitudes toward Race in America, 1815–1859* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960); Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1989); and Keith F. Davis, *The Origins of American Photography: From Daguerreotype to Dry-Plate, 1839–1885* (Kansas City: Hall Family Foundation and Nelson-Atkins Museum of Art, 2007).
10. See John Stauffer, “‘Not Suitable for Public Notice’: Agassiz’s Evidence,” chap. 10, this vol.
11. For more on Louis Agassiz’s writing on the Ice Age and his engagement with Jean-Pierre Perraudin’s ideas, see Christoph Irmscher, “The Ice King,” in his book *Louis Agassiz: Creator of American Science* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2013), especially pp. 64–84.

12. Louis Agassiz quoted in Laura Dassow Walls, "Textbooks and Texts from the Brooks: Inventing Scientific Authority in America," *American Quarterly* 49, no. 1 (March 1997), p. 1. See also Irmscher, *Louis Agassiz*.
13. Gould, *The Mismeasure of Man*, p. 74.
14. Jasmine Nichole Cobb, *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2015). The outgrowth of this moment of the nineteenth century has led to a long, well-theorized history about the role of looking as a constitutive part of the construction of the history portraiture of African Americans. See Richard J. Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008); Huey Copeland, *Bound to Appear: Art, Slavery, and the Site of Blackness in Multicultural America* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013); W. J. T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1994); Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011); and Nicole R. Fleetwood, *On Racial Icons: Blackness and the Public Imagination* (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2015).
15. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph," in his book *Soundings from the Atlantic* (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1864), p. 126.
16. Oliver Wendell Holmes, "Doings of the Sunbeam," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1863, p. 15.
17. We see this throughout Oliver Wendell Holmes's essays from 1859 through 1863, including "The Stereoscope and the Stereograph"; "Sun-Painting and Sun-Sculpture," *Atlantic Monthly*, July 1861; and "Doings of the Sunbeam."
18. Holmes, "Doings of the Sunbeam," p. 15. My thanks to Jennifer Roberts for a productive conversation about the suggestive nature of these specific terms.
19. Murray, "From Here I Saw What Happened and I Cried," p. 49.
20. See Geoffrey Batchen, "Dreams of Ordinary Life: Cartes-de-Visite and the Bourgeois Imagination," in *Photography: Theoretical Snapshots*, J. J. Long, Andrea Noble, and Edward Welch, eds. (London: Routledge, 2009), p. 94.
21. Christoph Irmscher, "Mr. Agassiz's 'Photographic Saloon,'" chap. 7, this vol., quoting Louis and Elizabeth Agassiz, *A Journey in Brazil*, 6th ed. (Boston: Ticknor and Fields, 1968), p. 276.
22. William James, "Brazilian Diary" (November 10, 1865), in *Brazil through the Eyes of William James: Letters, Diaries, and Drawings, 1865–1866*, Helena P. T. Machado, ed., and John M. Monteiro, trans. (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2006), p. 88.
23. For more on the parallels between crime and the Zealy images, see Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs*, pp. 57–58. For more on photography and eugenics, see Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography* on the Color Line: *W. E. B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2004), pp. 51–54.
24. See Vivien Green Fryd, *Art and Empire: The Politics of Ethnicity in the U.S. Capitol, 1815–1860* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1992), pp. 62–76. My thanks to Richard Powell for his generosity in thinking about this idea with me at a key moment in editing this piece. Fryd mentions that Horatio Greenough, a former student at Harvard, had been influenced by the then representative Edward Everett, who had been the chair of Greek literature at Harvard (p. 68).
25. "Congress," *Niles' Weekly Register*, Baltimore, May 21, 1842, pp. 179–80.
26. After *Sartor Resartus* was reviewed in America by Nathaniel L. Frothingham for the *Christian Examiner* in 1836, it sold quickly, resulting in the publication of subsequent editions in 1837 and 1840, such that 69,000 copies had been sold by 1881. By 1846, Carlyle had entered into a contract with Wiley and Putnam to have all of his books published in America. The book was widely influential for the transcendental movement and the developing feminist moment. See Thomas Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, Rodger L. Tarr, ed. (1833; repr. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2000), pp. xxx–xxxiv. See also Comaroff and Comaroff, "Fashioning the Colonial Subject."
27. Carlyle, *Sartor Resartus*, p. 27.
28. Irmscher, *Louis Agassiz*, p. 87.
29. Paul Staiti, *Of Arms and Artists: The American Revolution through Painters' Eyes* (New York: Bloomsbury Press, 2016), p. 61.
30. Roger B. Stein, "Charles Willson Peale's Expressive Design: The Artist in His Museum," in *Reading American Art* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1998), p. 43.
31. *Ibid.*, p. 61.
32. See Laura Rigal, "Peale's Mammoth," in *American Iconology: New Approaches to Nineteenth-Century Art and Literature*, David C. Miller, ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1993), pp. 18–38.
33. Stein, "Charles Willson Peale's Expressive Design," p. 55.
34. The act of cloaking sculptural nudes for the sake of propriety was a well-known practice in nineteenth-century visual culture. In fact, in 1811, at Charles Willson Peale's request, a cloth partition covered the nude statuary in the Pennsylvania Academy. Visitors were allowed to view the works in single-sex groups only. Peale's son Raphaelle, with whom he had a famously contentious relationship, cited this practice in the trompe l'oeil *Venus Rising from the Sea—A Deception* (1822). A white sheet in the form of a kerchief covers the torso and legs of a white woman. Only her feet and hair are visible. The composition gives the illusion of a white cloth cloaking Venus, portrayed as she was in a very well-known painting through the widely circulated engravings by James Barry based on a painting by Valentine Green. The cloth looks so lifelike that it is nearly haptic—one feels as though one could



almost touch it. Many readings of the work also note the cloth's resonance with the sudarium, a kerchief that, after all, touched the body—often the area near a woman's breasts—and was worn close to the body by men. Raphaëlle Peale's trompe l'oeil chides the viewer, suggesting that the removal of the material covering the female body is a forbidden act—the very gesture that is central to Joseph T. Zealy's portraits of the enslaved African and American-born men and women, turning them from subjects into objects of permissible study.

35. See Elizabeth L. O'Leary, *At Beck and Call: The Representation of Domestic Servants in Nineteenth-Century American Painting* (Washington, D.C.: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1996), pp. 140–43; and Frances K. Pohl, *Framing America: A Social History of American Art* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 2002), p. 265.

36. O'Leary, *At Beck and Call*, 142.

37. See James Sidbury, *Ploughshares into Swords: Race, Rebellion, and Identity in Gabriel's Virginia, 1730–1810* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1997), pp. 55–94; and Joseph Roach, *Cities of the Dead: Circum-Atlantic Performance* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

38. Ruthann Robson, “Beyond Sumptuary: Constitutionalism, Clothes, and Bodies in Anglo-American Law, 1215–1789,” *British Journal of American Legal Studies* 2, no. 2 (Fall 2013), 477.

39. Thurea Duffies's testimony from September 2, 1865, is listed in “Miscellaneous Reports and Lists,” Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen and Abandoned Lands, 1865–1869, Records of the Assistant Commissioner for the District of Columbia, National Archives Microfilm Publication, M1055, Roll 21, <http://freedmensbureau.com/washingtondc/outrages2.htm>.

40. Gregg Hecimovich, email message to the author, November 14, 2015; see Hecimovich, “The Life and Times of Alfred, Delia, Drona, Fassena, Jack, Jem, and Renty,” chap. 2, this vol. See also Thomas Taylor, Inventory Papers, Richland County, South Carolina Wills and Probate Records, 1670–1980 (Estate Papers, Box 30, Packages 726–750, 1799–1955), South Carolina County Court (Richland County); Probate Place: Richland, South Carolina; Benjamin F. Taylor, Inventory Papers, Richland County, South Carolina Wills and Probate Records, 1670–1980 (Estate Papers, Box 59, Packages 1451–1475, 1799–1955). Author: South Carolina County Court (Richland County); Probate Place: Richland, South Carolina; Sarah C. Taylor Probate Papers, Richland County, South Carolina Wills and Probate Records, 1670–1980 (Estate Papers, Boxes 59, Packages 1451–1475), South Carolina County Court (Richland County), Probate Place: Richland, South Carolina.

41. Melissa Banta, *A Curious and Ingenious Art: Reflections on Daguerreotypes at Harvard* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2000), p. 47.

42. Harvey Young, *Embodying Black Experience: Stillness, Critical Memory, and the Black Body* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2010), p. 48. Young's focus on the “stillness” of the Joseph T. Zealy daguerreotypes as a way of challenging the idea of

movement creating the African diaspora extends the work of Herbert S. Klein, who has looked at the stillness of the transatlantic slave trade and the often forgotten periods of captive waiting that preceded mass movement. See Herbert S. Klein, *The Atlantic Slave Trade* (Cambridge, U.K.: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p. 130. For more on the power relationships at work in the images, also see Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, p. 47.

43. Sara Baartman is often referred to as Saartje Baartman. See Zoë Strother, “Personal communication with Dr. Sandra Klopper,” November 25, 1997, cited in Zoë Strother, “Display of the Body Hottentot,” in *Africans on Stage: Studies in Ethnological Show Business*, Bernth Lindfors, ed. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999), pp. 1–61, see p. 27. See also Sander L. Gilman, “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature,” *Critical Inquiry* 12, no. 1 (1985), 204–42; and Anne Fausto-Sterling, “Gender, Race, and Nation: The Comparative Anatomy of ‘Hottentot’ Women in Europe, 1815–1817,” in *Deviant Bodies: Critical Perspectives on Difference in Science and Popular Culture*, Jennifer Terry and Jacqueline Urla, eds. (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1995), pp. 19–48.

44. Edward Lurie, *Louis Agassiz: A Life in Science* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1960), p. 56.

45. Strother, “Display of the Body Hottentot,” p. 27 (emphasis in original).

46. Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004), p. 7. See also Edward E. Baptist, “‘Cuffy,’ ‘Fancy Maids,’ and ‘One-Eyed Men’: Rape, Commodification, and the Domestic Slave Trade in the United States,” *American Historical Review* 106, no. 5 (December 2001), pp. 1619–50; Adrienne D. Davis, “‘Don’t Let Nobody Bother Yo’ Principle’: The Sexual Economy of American Slavery,” in *Sister Circle: Black Women and Work*, Sharon Harley, ed. (New Brunswick, N.J.: Rutgers University Press, 2002), pp. 103–27; Daina Ramey Berry, “*Swing the Sickle for the Harvest Is Ripe*”: *Gender and Slavery in Antebellum Georgia* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007); and Daina Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 2017).

47. See Dorothy Roberts, *Killing the Black Body: Race, Reproduction, and the Meaning of Liberty* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1997).

48. Molly Rogers, *Delia's Tears: Race, Science, and Photography in Nineteenth-Century America* (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 2010).

49. Frederick Douglass, “Claims of the Negro Ethnologically Considered,” in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews. Vol. 2: 1847–1854*, John W. Blassingame, ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1982), pp. 2, 497–525. See Sean Ross Meehan, *Mediating American Autobiography: Photography in Emerson, Thoreau, Douglass, and Whitman* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2008), pp. 150–54.

50. Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," in *The Frederick Douglass Papers. Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews. Vol. 3: 1855–1863*, John W. Blassingame, ed. (New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1985), pp. 453–459. Douglass delivered another version of this speech at Wieting Hall in Syracuse, New York, on November 15, 1861. For the full transcript of all of these speeches, see John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright, 2015). Also see Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "Frederick Douglass's Camera Obscura: Representing the Antislave 'Clothed and in Their Own Form,'" *Critical Inquiry* 42, no. 1 (Autumn 2015), pp. 31–60; Henry Louis Gates, Jr., and Kwame Anthony Appiah, eds., "Race," *Writing, and Difference* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1986); Laura Wexler, "A More Perfect Likeness: Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation," in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, ed. Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 18–40; and Ginger Hill, "Rightly Viewed: Theorizations of Self in Frederick Douglass's Lectures on Pictures," in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, ed. Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham, N.C.: Duke University Press, 2012), pp. 41–82. I also have discussed Douglass's speeches in Sarah Lewis, *The Rise: Creativity, the Gift of Failure, and the Search for Mastery* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2014).
51. Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," p. 461.
52. Harriet Beecher Stowe, letter dated September 27, 1852, quoted in H. Montgomery Hyde, *Mr. and Mrs. Beeton* (London: George Harrap, 1951), pp. 42–43 (emphasis in original); and Claire Parfait, *The Publishing History of Uncle Tom's Cabin, 1852–2002* (Burlington, Vt.: Ashgate, 2007), pp. 84–86. See also Mark Miller, *Cast Down: Abjection in America, 1700–1850* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2016), pp. 127, 131.
53. See Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, a Symbol* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1996), p. 139; and Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Enduring Truths: Sojourner's Shadows and Substance* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2015).
54. *Liberator*, Boston, October 15, 1858, cited in Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, p. 139.
55. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, pp. 139–40.
56. *Ibid.*, pp. 187–99.
57. Quoted in Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), p. 54.
58. For more on pain as connected with liberation strategies, see Courtney Baker, *Humane Insight: Looking at Images of African American Suffering and Death* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2015).
59. Vincent Colyer, *Report of the Services Rendered by the Freed People to the United States Army, in North Carolina, in the Spring of 1862, after the Battle of Newbern* (New York: Vincent Colyer, 1864), p. 13.
60. David Silkenat, "A Typical Negro': Gordon, Peter, Vincent Colyer and the Story behind Slavery's Most Famous Photograph," *American Nineteenth Century History* 15, no. 2 (2014), 181.
61. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, p. 187.
62. The observance of these politics of respectability were set down by the National Baptist Convention (founded in 1895) with its auxiliary separate group, the Women's Convention, which was organized in 1912. See Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880–1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), p. 192.
63. Henry Louis Gates, Jr., "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," *Representations*, "America Reconstructed, 1840–1940," no. 24 (Autumn 1988), pp. 136–37.
64. Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*, p. 192. See also David Levering Lewis and Deborah Willis, *A Small Nation of People: W. E. B. Du Bois and African American Portraits of Progress* (New York: Amistad, 2003), pp. 52–53.
65. Alain Locke, *The Negro in Art: A Pictorial Record of the Negro Artist and of the Negro Theme in Art* (Washington, D.C.: Associates in Negro Folk Education, 1940; repr. New York: Hacker Art Books, 1971, 1979), p. 205. Reviews of Winslow Homer's work from the nineteenth century predicted this.
66. G. W. Sheldon, "American Painters—Winslow Homer and F. A. Bridgman," *Art Journal* 49 (1878), p. 227. Also quoted in Mary Ann Calo, "Winslow Homer's Visits to Virginia during Reconstruction," *American Art Journal* 12, no. 1 (Winter 1980), p. 5.
67. Calo, "Winslow Homer's Visits to Virginia During Reconstruction," p. 20. This comment was paraphrased by the *New York Sun* on the occasion of an 1898 exhibition at the Union League. *New York Sun*, March 12, 1898, quoted in a clipping in the Clark and Downes Scrapbook, 1889–1902, Archives of American Art, Whitney Museum Papers, Roll N 599, Frame 83.
68. Elizabeth M. Smith-Pryor, *Property Rites: The Rhinelander Trial, Passing, and the Protection of Whiteness* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), p. 196. I am grateful to Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham for her encouragement to consider this case as it related to the argument of this essay. I subsequently mentioned this trial to Kalia Howell, a graduate student in the History of Art and Architecture Department at Harvard, who explored this topic for a research paper, and I would like to commend her for discovering extraordinary unpublished visual material related to the trial.
69. *Ibid.*, p. 198.
70. *Ibid.*, p. 197.

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**Chapter 11**

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**Figure 11.7.** Stiles Tuttle Colwill

**Figure 11.8.** Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

**Figure 11.9.** Houghton Library, Harvard University, Cambridge, Mass.

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*To Make Their Own Way in the World*  
*The Enduring Legacy of the Zealy Daguerreotypes*

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Foreword by Henry Louis Gates, Jr.

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