

Visualizing Equality: African American Abolitionist Champions of
Race, Rights, and Visual Culture, 1830-1880

by

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Abstract

“Visualizing Equality: African American Abolitionist Champions of Race, Rights, and Visual Culture, 1830-1880” charts the changing roles of African American visual artists who shaped representations of African Americans during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. These artists, and the individuals who circulated their images, intended to change not only *what* people saw when they saw race, they also instructed them about *how* they should see it. Understudied or nearly forgotten artists – including Patrick Henry Reason, Robert Douglass Jr., James Presley Ball Sr., Henry Box Brown – produced images that subverted popular stereotypes of African Americans. Some of the images produced by these individuals underscored the brutalities of slavery, visualized black respectability, and celebrated black leadership.

Other scholars have argued that visual culture profoundly shaped the racial, political, and cultural milieu of the nineteenth century. *Visualizing Equality* builds on the work of scholars of race and visual culture to show how black visual artists embedded political messages that supported black freedoms within images. It argues that the fight for black rights occurred when African Americans controlled visual technologies and produced images of black people.

Marshaling advances in science and visual technologies such as daguerreotypy, moving panoramas, and *cartes de visite*, these African American artists adapted to limitations and opportunities in depicting racialized bodies. Their images, along with their speeches, letters, church involvement, and civic activities reveal a politics of racial representation. As cultural producers, they held stakes in the portrayal of African Americans and in expanding and refining

discourses of race before, during, and after the Civil War. It is in the work of these African American artists that we see their radical challenges to the dominant ways of seeing and thinking about blackness during these periods. This project encourages scholars to reimagine the production and consumption of images because it provides rich analyses of visual culture and visuality in the United States during the nineteenth century.

Introduction

In 1846 Philadelphia, Abby Kelley Foster, the antislavery activist, spoke before audiences – some ardent supporters and others raucous opponents – about her belief that slavery was deeply inhumane. Between lectures, she visited the daguerreotype gallery operated by an African American man, Robert Douglass Jr., whose deep commitment to expanding the opportunities for black people mirrored Foster's. Having founded a literary society for African American men in Philadelphia, participated in antislavery societies, and lectured about and exhibited images he created during a transformative trip to Haiti, Douglass eagerly welcomed Foster into his studio. Douglass was “anxious to give the world a correct transcript of the features of one so entirely devoted to the interests of humanity,” he wrote. He had commissioned a lithograph of Foster's portrait daguerreotype and revealed the “motive which... impelled [him]” to create the image. “If in regarding your portrait a single spirit is encouraged to enter upon the same glorious, although arduous labors,” he wrote, “or excited to action for the advancement of the great and Holy cause [of abolition] in which you are so indefatigably engaged I shall be amply rewarded.”¹

Douglass' words testified to the power of images during the middle of the nineteenth century. The lithograph served to commemorate Foster and her dedication to the antislavery cause. It also possessed the capability to increase antislavery sentiment and action, according to Douglass. It was a powerful claim to suggest that the image could convert people to the cause of

¹ Letter from Robert Douglass Jr. to Abby Kelley Foster, May 12, 1846. Abby Kelley Foster Collection. American Antiquarian Society.

antislavery. This project answers several questions including: Why did African American visual artists turn to visual media to depict African Americans during the tumult of the middle half of the nineteenth century? How did African American visual artists construct images in ways that deviated from and paralleled those created by white visual artists? How did images inspire viewers to improve the status of African Americans in the United States? In answering these questions, it becomes clear that African American artists fundamentally altered the corpus of imagery depicting black people when they controlled and produced visual modes of technology to represent members of their race.

“Visualizing Equality” charts the changing roles of African American visual artists who shaped the visual culture depicting African Americans during the middle decades of the nineteenth century. These artists, and the individuals who circulated their images, intended to change not only *what* people saw relating to race, they instructed them on *how* they should see it. The project investigates how these understudied or nearly forgotten artists produced images that often subverted stereotypes of African Americans. Envisioned as propaganda and designed to sway the hearts, minds, and actions of viewers, these images underscored the brutalities of slavery, promoted black respectability, and celebrated black leadership. By marshaling advances in science and visual technologies such as daguerreotypy, moving panoramas, and *cartes de visite*, these artists adapted to limitations and opportunities for depicting racialized bodies. Moreover, their images evidenced a transatlantic network of activism and artistic influence that animated their work and teachings. Images, however, cannot speak for themselves. The process of examining these artists’ images along with their speeches, letters, and participation in benevolent societies reveals their involvement with the politics of racial representation. Black

artists were cultural producers with stakes in the portrayal of African Americans that expanded and refined discourses of race before, during, and after the Civil War.

Several inventions made the middle decades of the nineteenth century a time of great change in the history of visual culture. Revolutions in visual technologies included the invention of the daguerreotype, the proliferation of the lithograph, the revival of the moving panorama, the emergence of the illustrated newspaper, and the invention of *cartes de visite*. Black artists mobilized the popularity, desirability, and unique capabilities of varying media. These changes unfolded alongside developments in the abolitionist movement, the turmoil of the Civil War, and the ensuing possibilities of Reconstruction. African American activists became increasingly vocal, visible, and numerous partly due to racial discrimination that targeted people of African descent in the United States and abroad.

Historians such as Manisha Sinha, David Brion Davis, and Richard Newman have expanded the chronology of abolitionist activism and included African Americans among its participants.² The literature has largely overlooked the role of black artists. My project forefronts visual documents created by black abolitionist artists to expand further the scope of abolitionist activity taken up by black men and women. For example, one of the founders of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, Amy Matilda Cassey, circulated a “friendship album” among her Northern abolitionist friends who inscribed poems, drawings, and paintings with messages of abolition and female friendship. This source, and the three other known friendship albums

² See Manish Sinha, “An Alternative Tradition of Radicalism: African American Abolitionists and the Metaphor of Revolution” in Manisha Sinha and Penny Von Eschen, eds., *Contested Democracy: Freedom, Race, and Power in American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 9-30; Phil Lapsansky, Richard Newman, and Patrick Rael, eds., *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975); Timothy McCarthy and John Stauffer, eds., *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of the American Abolitionism* (New York: New Press, 2006); Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991).

belonging to other nineteenth century African American women, document the networks of friendship among abolitionists – men, women, black and white – who propelled the abolitionist movement forward. They also serve as repositories of the images studied in this dissertation. This project’s analysis of these albums expand the scope of abolitionist activities beyond the scholarship of Sinha, Quarles, and Newman by illustrating how images created and shared among friends strengthened kinship networks between abolitionists. The visual documents examined in this project show that the fight for black rights not only took place at marches, political conventions, and benevolent societies; the fight included print and visual culture created and disseminated throughout the United States by African Americans.

My project bridges the scholarship of abolitionism and visual culture to show how African Americans themselves crafted some images to advance racial equality in the nineteenth century. Scholars such as Grey Gundaker and Mary Niall Mitchell have demonstrated the importance of print and visual culture in disseminating antislavery messages.³ In *Raising Freedom’s Child*, Mitchell showed how images of enslaved people instilled fears and anxieties in white viewers. Abolitionists in the United States appropriated images of kneeling slaves used by British abolitionists in the eighteenth century to heighten the visibility of abolitionist sentiments in the United States. One of the black engravers in my study, Patrick Henry Reason, created numerous images of supplicant slaves that the American Anti-Slavery Society then printed in thousands of books and as correspondence letterhead to spread the message of abolitionism. Moreover, Reason’s portrait engravings of escaped slaves clashed with the stereotypical images of escaped slaves. My project argues that Reason’s images offered their viewers countercultural

³ Grey Gundaker, “Give Me a Sign: African Americans, Print, and Practice” in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society, 1790-1840* eds. Robert Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 483-494; Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds., *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women’s Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994); Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom’s Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future After Slavery* (New York: New York University, 2008).

representations of African Americans as individuals, not stereotypes, who should be recognized as people, not chattel. Black artists favored transformative social reform enabled by their images. I expand historians' understanding of what constitutes activism by adding the production of visual materials and these African American artists to this historiography.

“Visualizing Equality” builds on the work of scholars of race and visual culture to show how black visual artists embedded political messages that supported black freedoms within visual media. Scholars of the nineteenth century have argued that studying race, images, and performance together can reveal the profound ways in which images and performances altered how nineteenth century white Americans envisioned themselves as workers and as people of different races and ethnicities.⁴ In *Wages of Whiteness*, David Roediger argues that blackface minstrel performances helped solidify white working class ethnic identities. While Roediger studied white blackface performers, W.T. Lhamon highlights African American blackface minstrels in *Raising Cain*. African Americans and the familiarity white ethnic groups had with them – as opposed to merely a phantasmagoric idea of blackness – figure prominently in his narrative about fetishized knowledge that becomes performance. In *Love and Theft*, Eric Lott also explores blackface minstrelsy in the antebellum North, but he focuses more than Lhamon on the print culture that derived from and informed blackface minstrelsy. He explicates the hypersexualized imagery of blackface performers on sheet music and studies the blackface minstrelsy that takes its cues from *Uncle Tom's Cabin*. My project engages these scholars' persuasive studies of visuality, or learned ways of seeing and understanding, to underscore how

⁴ Some important works on racial performance include Thomas Holt, “Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History,” *American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (February 1995), William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999), W.T. Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003), Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993), W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000).

black artists envisioned their visual production to shape the ways in which people viewed race, religion, and politics.

Placing the visual production of the African American artists in this study in conversation with the black stereotypes and caricatures circulating during this era reveals the strident differences between the two groups. It also provides context for the elements of visual culture repudiated by the images that African American visual artists created. Representations found in a variety of media during the early nineteenth century commonly depicted abolitionists and black people in a derogatory light. As Corey Capers and several other scholars have shown, some of the most widely circulated and visible of these images mocked free black Bostonians' commemoration of the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts. These "bobalition" prints derided African Americans by presenting them with cartoonish bodies and disproportionate clothing, speaking in stereotypical black dialect. Additionally, dozens of prints created by white artist Edward Williams Clay communicated the idea that African Americans merely aspired to, but never deserved, social equality. This study of negative portrayals of blackness is essential for understanding the ways in which the work of African American artists rejected these ideas and proposed alternative visions of African American identities and cultures.

This project adds additional contours to the scholarship of the visual culture produced during the Civil War by examining black-authored images of soldiers and fugitive slaves. The works of historians Joshua Brown, Alice Fahs, and Kate Masur have demonstrated how imagery became central to the ways in which people developed their ideas about race and citizenship during the Civil War.⁵ The current scholarship, however, does not address the visual culture

⁵ Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of the Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002); Alice Fahs, *The Imagined Civil War: Popular Literature of the North & South, 1861-1865* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003); Kate Masur, "'A Rare

produced by African Americans during this era or the ways in which African Americans leaders envisioned visual culture produced by African Americans to modify substantially race relations in the United States. Black photographers such as James P. Ball of Ohio and Edward Bannister of Massachusetts practiced their trade during the Civil War. These men produced stridently dissimilar images of African Americans than those most often printed in illustrated newspapers during the era. At other times, they produced images that paralleled those that valorized African American men's Union military service.

"Visualizing Equality" builds on the rich scholarship of nineteenth century black communities in Philadelphia and New York, but also examines the circulation of images beyond these geographies. The work of Shane White and Leslie Harris provide strong foundations for understanding black protests in New York as negotiations that helped end slavery in New York while also examining the degrees of freedom experienced by free black people.⁶ My project builds on this line of thought by interpreting the visual culture of African American engravers, lithographers, and photographers as advancing arguments that repudiated slavery. Julie Winch's *Philadelphia's Black Elite* provides insight into the intersecting religious and political worlds of free black Philadelphians. This book and also Winch's *A Gentleman of Color* demonstrate the importance of black leadership and protest in antebellum Philadelphia.⁷ My project shows how printed texts, photographs, and manuscripts helped support these networks of friendship, leadership, and activism beyond the cities of New York, Philadelphia, Boston, and Cincinnati.

Phenomenon of Philological Vegetation': The Word 'Contraband' and the Meaning of Emancipation in the United States," *Journal of American History*, 93 no. 4 (2007).

⁶ Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991); Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁷ Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Julie Winch, *A Gentleman of Color: The Life of James Forten* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

The circulation of the images created by black artists challenges the conceptual boundaries of geography present in other scholarship.

The social, political, and racialized contexts of black artists' visual production are the driving force and interpretative frameworks of the project. With an eye to the concepts of race and gender, scholars of visual culture have analyzed visual material as determining how viewers derive and create meaning in their lives – and the lives of others.⁸ In *Sight Unseen*, Martin Berger argues that scholars of visual culture must be aware that “discourses circulating outside art objects circumscribe their significance.”⁹ The notion that these discourses – limited only by the extent to which one has been exposed to them – inform one’s readings of race, class, gender, and numerous other topics and ideologies, powerfully demonstrates Berger’s belief that social context fundamentally structures how one views visual art forms. A study of the discourses surrounding African American communities are essential for understanding the cultural work of black-authored images during the time period of my project. The topics of Haitian emigration, black religious leadership, and the politics of the Fugitive Slave Act constitute a few of the touchstones that black artists embedded and addressed in their visual production. Situating black artists within the debates that they participated in about black voting rights, the abolition of slavery, and the role of black literary societies reveals the signifying strategies that black artists adopted with the hope of securing freedoms and equality for black Americans.

⁸ Some of the most salient books that study the intersection of visual culture and race include Martin Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), Anthony Lee, *Picturing Chinatown: Art and Orientalism in San Francisco* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), Lisa Bloom, *With Other Eyes: Looking at Race and Gender in Visual Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1999), Patricia Johnson, *Seeing High and Low: Representing Social Conflict in American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005), and Philip Deloria, *Indians in Unexpected Places* (Lawrence Kansas: University of Kansas Press, 2004).

⁹ Berger, 14.

Though many scholars have written about black *subjects* in early photography, fewer have written about black *photographers*.¹⁰ The art historian, Deborah Willis, has chronicled the lives and work of African American photographers across the United States and analyzed portraits of African Americans, most recently with Barbara Krauthamer in their book *Envisioning Emancipation*. Shawn Michelle Smith interprets the images of African American subjects displayed by W.E.B. DuBois at the 1900 Paris Exposition as repudiating the scientific racism prevalent at the turn of the twentieth century in her book *Photography on the Color Line*. The volume edited by Smith and Maurice Wallace, *Pictures and Progress*, demonstrates the growing scholarly recognition that nineteenth African American leaders understood well the power of images to shape perceptions of race during the nineteenth century. Likewise, Marcy Dinius' book, *The Camera and the Press*, argues that the popular press greatly influenced the ways in which nineteenth century viewers of photographs understood race to be represented scientifically. She investigates nineteenth century literature to understand the relationship of photography to racial politics of slavery and emigration. My dissertation supplements this scholarship by expanding the visual terrain to include engravings and several other visual forms that each served distinctive functions to within a particular cultural and political milieu.

As is the case for many historical sources related to African American history, institutions in the nineteenth century did not preserve many of the photographs, paintings, and

¹⁰ See: Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Portraits of a People* (Washington D.C.: Addison Gallery of American Art, 2006), Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. DuBois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), Deborah Willis, *Posing Beauty: African American Images from the 1890s to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2009), Deborah Willis, *J.P. Ball: Daguerrean and Studio Photographer* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Deborah Willis-Thomas, *Black Photographers: An Illustrated Bio-bibliography* (New York: Garland Press, 1985), Deborah Willis and Carla Williams, eds., *The Black Female Body: A Photographic History* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2002); Marcy Dinius, *The Camera and the Press: American Visual and Print Culture in the Age of the Daguerreotype* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012); Shawn Michelle Smith and Maurice O. Wallace, eds., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012) .

lithographs created by the African Americans artists. After gradual recognition that their work portrayed contentious issues including abolitionism, black voting rights, and the future of formerly enslaved people, archives and institutions have slowly acquired these sources and other evidence of these people's lives and artistic production. The numerous extant sources that remain serve as the foundation of my project. I have crafted my dissertation from a rich and varied visual source base consisting of title page images in abolitionist books and periodicals, engravings, lithographs, photographs in family albums, painted banners of black political organizations, and traveling "friendship albums" displaying the art of black men and women.

To gauge and interpret the reception of these images, I scrutinize textual sources such as reviews of exhibitions, newspaper articles, diary entries, legal documents, and personal correspondence. I employ this strategy to treat images and responses to them as evidence of how imagery became central to how people developed ideas about race, citizenship, and politics during the nineteenth century. These documents elucidate both how viewers interpreted their work and how black artists hoped their images would be understood. Additionally, sources such as petitions, benevolent organization minutes, and the proceedings of religious and auxiliary associations provide essential contexts for understanding black artists' various audiences during the middle half of the nineteenth century. Together, these textual sources simultaneously build a rich historical context for the images analyzed in this project and also elucidate the political activism of these black visual artists.

Chapter 1 examines the images created by Patrick Henry Reason and Robert Douglass Jr. during the decade of the 1830s. As Garrisonian antislavery activists envisioned that images evoked in viewers a wide spectrum of emotions on the subject of slavery, Reason and Douglass fashioned images of escaped slaves that celebrated antislavery figures and their teachings. Both

individuals appropriated visual tropes legible to nineteenth century viewers and transformed them to fit the context of slavery and antislavery propaganda in the United States. Furthermore, the dissemination of their images in easily reproducible media allowed their work to be viewed by large audiences spread across a substantial geographic expanse. Juxtaposing their visual production and their involvement in numerous benevolent societies renders visible their corresponding dedication to the livelihood of African Americans unencumbered by racialized persecution. Douglass experienced this firsthand in a trip to Haiti that would inspire his artwork and thinking for decades to come.

The second chapter analyzes the speeches and letters of Patrick Henry Reason and Robert Douglass Jr. to show how they believed their images advanced the cause of abolitionism during the 1840s. I argue that the visual production of these men elucidated ongoing debates about fugitive slaves, the cause of antislavery, and the role of Haiti in black self-determination among African Americans. These images highlighted the expansion of their engagement in the commemoration of black religious leaders, depiction of “black genius,” and celebration of black Haitian culture. During a decade that marked a rise in leadership roles for African Americans in antislavery circles, Patrick Henry Reason and Robert Douglass Jr. joined campaigns to protest plans of emigration, advocate for free black voting rights, and educate viewers about black Haitian leadership. Their participation in these enterprises further revealed the business strategies that both Reason and Douglass employed to continue their visual production.

Chapter 3 examines the three moving panoramas toured by three black men – James Presley Ball, William Wells Brown, and Henry Box Brown after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850. I argue that each man adopted the medium of the moving panorama soon after it regained popularity to exhibit the horrors of enslavement and fund antislavery campaigns

in England and the United States. Each centered the experiences of enslaved African-descended people using the medium of the moving panorama, which most commonly entertained audiences with landscapes. The reactions to the antislavery panoramas demonstrated that viewers believed the views of slavery to be partly educational and partly inspirational. The responses elucidate how audience members understood and made meaning from the representation of African-descended people. They also testify to the tactics used by Ball, Brown, and Box Brown to convince viewers of the authenticity and veracity of the scenes that they presented.

The fourth chapter analyzes how the elements of different visual media and the power wielded by those who controlled the production of images shaped the visual cultures of race during the Civil War. The illustrated newspapers circulating in the United States during the Civil War provided context for popular views and ideas of race during the time that African American photographers advanced their own views and ideas about the possibilities of emancipation and African American military service. I argue that images of black people created by African Americans subverted widespread representations and their accompanying significations of black people, while at other times, they documented their lives with common visual touchstones. Furthermore, in analyzing the preparation of an exhibition of African American art and industry, this chapter shows the ways in which many African Americans envisioned art to improve elevate perceptions of black intellect, improve race relations, and encourage the recognition of black achievement among African American communities.

The last chapter analyzes the linkages between prominent black Reconstruction leaders, the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and the visual production of Robert Douglass Jr., James Presley Ball, Thomas C. Ball, and Alexander S. Thomas. I argue that black artists used visual materials to advance the growth and goals of the AME Church which often overlapped

with the Reconstruction politics of black leaders. Contributing to the commemorative practices of creating and displaying images of black AME Church leaders and elected politicians, J.P. Ball forged his own political identity as a Mississippi officeholder. Meanwhile, Robert Douglass Jr. crafted images that revealed his stakes in the visual culture of John Brown, black Union veterans, and the future of Cuba. The visual production of Ball and Douglass underscored the important roles that visual culture played in the AME Church and the communities that Douglass and Ball moved between. The reception of their images as well as those of other Reconstruction era images further elucidated how African American viewers made meaning from images that they viewed at home or in church. Furthermore, as technological developments increasingly allowed families to afford and collect images, they fashioned their own constructions of family that operated according to their individual logics.

The dissertation rethinks the terrain on which political arguments can take shape, unfold, and reach audiences. It argues that the fight for black rights in the antebellum North occurred in more places than marches and political conventions; the fight included visual culture created by African Americans. Douglass' Haitian paintings and his images of African Americans created during the 1830s and 1840s celebrated the cause of abolition and rights for both enslaved and free African Americans. By layering analyses of African American artists' images with their racially progressive civic activities, the dissertation argues how these individuals tasked themselves with producing and disseminating knowledge about blackness that fundamentally renounced dominant stereotypes of race. The artists intended, and diligently worked to realize, sweeping social change resulting from the internalization of the messages that their images communicated. As questions about Garrisonian antislavery tactics, Haitian emigration, the Fugitive Slave Act, black Civil War service, and the growth of the African Methodist Episcopal

Church engaged Americans during the middle decades of the nineteenth century, black artists used their skills to stake out their positions. As the nineteenth century progressed, they embraced new visual technologies to represent African Americans in ways that challenged the dominant visual culture of race during the period of their creation. With their visual interventions in mind, this project encourages scholars to reimagine the production and consumption of print and visual culture in the United States during the nineteenth century.

Chapter 1

“Genius Roused from Slumber”: Fugitive Gentility and Black Achievement

During the 1830s, two African American artists working in Philadelphia and New York City subverted racial stereotypes. They produced counternarratives in the service of black social equality, political enfranchisement, and freedom from slavery. These men – Patrick Henry Reason and Robert Douglass Jr. – created images of black people and white abolitionists that challenged flagrantly racist messages presented to nineteenth century audiences. Using art as propaganda, they hoped to convert viewers of their work to the cause of antislavery and inspire them to dismantle the institution of slavery in the United States. Thousands of people viewed their messages of black respectability and moral uprightness with the support of local abolitionists and national organizations such as the American Anti-Slavery Society. The desire to root out racial discrimination compelled Reason and Douglass Jr. to reform what they believed to be a culture of pro-slavery that imperiled black bodies and white minds. Their work constituted a cultural weapon with which black actors challenged stereotypes of blackness and produced counternarratives in the service of rights for free and enslaved African Americans. Identifying these black men as cultural producers with stakes in the representation of African Americans highlights their role in both expanding and refining discourses of race in the antebellum United States.

This chapter examines images created by Patrick Henry Reason and Robert Douglass Jr. during the 1830s to show the broad range of antislavery activity fostered by black men and

women. Their black-authored images affirmed the dignity of African-descended people in ways that have largely been unexamined by scholars who have primarily focused their studies on white-authored visual materials.¹ This historiographical intervention highlights African Americans' artistic production and its instrumental role in advancing the abolitionist movement, revealing networks of black and white leadership, and envisioning the livelihood of African American communities during the 1830s. The cultural milieu shaped, and in turn was shaped by, Reason and Douglass through the technologies of print and visual culture that contributed to understandings of race and reinvigorated the antislavery movement of the 1830s. The broad education – artistic, political, academic, and international – of Douglass and the images that he created opposed prevailing notions of African Americans and proffered support for the antislavery movement. Reason's artistic training and his connection to the American Anti-Slavery Society resulted in his images being circulated by the thousands in the form of fugitive slave narratives. The lives and artistic work of Reason and Douglass mark a significant rupture in the ways that visual artists commonly depicted African Americans by overlaying visual themes of religiosity, gentility, and human dignity.

EARLY BLACK LIFE IN PHILADELPHIA AND NEW YORK CITY

Scholars have explained that the African American communities of New York City and Philadelphia that Patrick Henry Reason and Robert Douglass Jr. called home experienced

¹ Corey Capers, "Black Voices, White Print: Racial Practice, Print Publicity, and Order in the Early American Republic," in *Early African American Print Culture*, eds. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 107–26; David Waldstreicher, "Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture, and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth-Century Mid-Atlantic," *William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no.2 (April 1999): 243–272; John Wood Sweet, *Bodies Politic: Negotiating Race in the American North, 1730–1830* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2006), 378–92; Joanne Pope Melish, *Disowning Slavery: Gradual Emancipation and Race in New England, 1780–1860* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2000), 171–82; Karen Weyler, *Empowering Words: Outsiders and Authorship in Early America* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 68–75.

degrees of freedom.² Though Pennsylvania had passed An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery in 1780 that initiated the slow abolition of slavery, enslaved African Americans lived in Pennsylvania through at least 1840, and many of those “freed” by the 1780 law became indentured servants for several decades. In 1799, New York passed a gradual abolition law that resulted in similar tiers of slavery and freedom for African Americans.³ Philadelphia counted among its population the largest free black population among Northern states while large communities of free African Americans lived in other cities such as New York, Boston, and Baltimore. Free black Philadelphians and New Yorkers established independent institutions during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, including black churches, schools, and literary societies as a means of coping with the widespread racial prejudice exhibited by white residents.⁴ These cultural institutions played an essential role in the development of the black community in both cities. Coinciding with the growth of black capital in Philadelphia, white violence directed at free black communities frequently, but temporarily, destroyed black neighborhoods and often claimed black lives. That state laws stripped free African American men of the right to vote in several Northern states marked another way that free African Americans experienced freedom by degrees. Furthermore, local law and social practice severely restricted employment opportunities for both free black men and women in both New York City and Philadelphia. As such, black Philadelphians and New Yorkers constantly negotiated their freedom according to legal policy and social practice.⁵

² Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

³ Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1626-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

⁴ Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988).

⁵ Shane White, *Somewhat More Independent: The End of Slavery in New York City, 1770-1810* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1991).

Despite the legally and socially sanctioned prejudice in Philadelphia and New York City, free African Americans fashioned rich and vibrant communities there. Black immigrants from Southern states and the Caribbean flocked to and infused these cities with their cultures.⁶ Distinct classes and communities within the black populations of these cities played vital roles in the development of education systems and networks of moral reform.⁷ In response to public and private schools' refusal to admit black children on the grounds of race, black men, black women, and their white allies established schools for African American children. Black men and women established literary societies and established committees dedicated to an increased quality of life for African Americans. African Americans convened in New York and Philadelphia to discuss emigration to Africa, the Caribbean, and South America and began building the foundations of an emergent black nationalism.⁸ Mutual aid societies started by black women aided black orphans and school children. In New York, Samuel Cornish and John Russwurm began publishing the first black newspaper in 1827. Black congregants listened as black religious such as the Reverend Peter Williams in New York City and the Reverend Absalom Jones in Philadelphia lambasted the international slave trade and the treatment of free African Americans in the United States. Ideologically, religiously, and economically diverse, the African American communities in Philadelphia and New York City established robust cultural institutions in the face of early nineteenth century race relations.

Black activists demanded the expansion of rights and privileges to free African Americans and supported the antislavery movement, another essential element in the black communities of Philadelphia and New York City. Historians such as Manisha Sinha, Benjamin

⁶ John Davies, "Saint-Dominguan Refugees of African Descent and the Forging of Ethnic Identity in Early National Philadelphia," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 134, no.2 (April 2010): 109-126.

⁷ Leslie Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*.

⁸ Leslie Alexander, *African or American? Black Identity and Popular Activism in New York City, 1784-1861* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2008).

Quarles, and Richard Newman have expanded the chronology of abolitionist activism and included African Americans among its participants.⁹ Deeply dismayed by the lack of liberty and equality that had been heralded during the era of the American Revolution, African Americans became the American Revolution's "most stringent and vocal critics."¹⁰ Faced with fluctuating legal protections and rising racial violence, African Americans increasingly organized and petitioned local and state legislatures. The slavery and indentured servitude they witnessed around them and the state-sanctioned enslavement in Southern states initiated the development of abolitionist cultures and engendered radical political activity among African Americans. Black churches, mutual aid societies, and schools fostered the expansion of ideologies that countered the dominant cultures of socially and legally sanctioned racism.¹¹

Churches and schools provided the spaces for the development of black radicalism. Print and visual culture offered the medium of expressing these sentiments. Scholars have emphasized that print and visual culture created by white authors shaped the abolitionist movement by appealing to religious principles, democratic values, and sentimentalism.¹² This chapter bridges the scholarship of abolitionism and visual culture to show how African Americans themselves authored images to advance racial equality in the nineteenth century. Antislavery activists, for

⁹ Manisha Sinha, "To 'Cast Just Obliquely' on Oppressors: Black Radicalism in the Age of Revolution," *William and Mary Quarterly* 64, no.1 (January 2007): 149-160; Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991); Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Phil Lapsansky, *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

¹⁰ Manisha Sinha, "To 'Cast Just Obliquely' on Oppressors," 150.

¹¹ Emma Lapsansky, "'Since They Got Those Separate Churches': Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia," *American Quarterly* 32, no.1 (Spring 1980): 54-78; Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite: Activism, Accommodation, and the Struggle for Autonomy, 1787-1848* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988); Jacqueline Bacon and Glen McClish, "Reinventing the Master's Tools: Nineteenth-Century African-American Literary Societies of Philadelphia and Rhetorical Education," *Rhetoric Society Quarterly* 30, no.4 (Autumn 2000): 19-47.

¹² Grey Gundaker, "Give Me a Sign: African Americans, Print, and Practice" in *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society, 1790-1840*, eds. Robert Gross and Mary Kelley (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 483-494; Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Phillip Lapsansky, *Pamphlets of Protests*; Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds. *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women's Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

example, appropriated images of kneeling slaves used by British abolitionists in the eighteenth century to heighten the visibility of abolitionist sentiments in the United States. Trained at one of the Free African Schools in New York, Patrick Henry Reason later created several images of supplicant slaves that the American Anti-Slavery Society printed in books and used as letterhead on correspondence. Reason's images of escaped slaves – with high collars, dapper neckties, smart jackets, and thoughtful facial expressions – clashed with the stereotyped images of escaped slaves wearing ragged clothing and bearing insipid facial expressions.

The fight for black rights not only took place at marches, political conventions, and benevolent societies; the fight included print and visual culture created and disseminated throughout the United States by African Americans. Analysis of visual materials that express abolitionist ideologies further expands the scope of abolitionist activity taken up by black people during the antebellum era. These materials reveal different strategies utilized by free African Americans to secure freedom for the enslaved. Amy Matilda Cassey, one of the founders of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, circulated a “friendship album” among her Northern abolitionist friends who inscribed poems, drawings, and paintings with messages of abolition and female friendship. This source, and three other known friendship albums belonging to other nineteenth century African American women, documented the networks of friendship among abolitionists – men and women, black and white – who propelled the abolitionist movement forward. They featured original and reproduced images that evoked the barbarities of slavery and the pressing insistence for its demise. Reason's images appeared as frontispieces to escaped slave narratives, Douglass' prints of abolitionists greeted passersby from their place in shop windows, and several friendship albums circulated among antislavery activists. Together, these artistic

works and material goods point to the crucial role that visual culture played in encouraging the widespread growth of antislavery beliefs.

RACIST IMAGES, RACIST IDEAS

Posted on public streets, collected for viewing at home, pasted to the ceilings of taverns, and printed in periodicals, images increasingly pervaded the lives of people living in the 1830s United States. Images that evoked the topic of race frequently perpetuated visual narratives of blackness as debased, comical, and inferior. Some of the most widely circulated and visible of these derogatory images appeared in the streets and inside parlors. In Boston, for example, several crudely printed images mocked free black Bostonians' commemoration of the abolition of slavery in Massachusetts. These "bobalition" prints derided African Americans by presenting them with thick black dialects, cartoonish bodies, and disproportionate clothing.¹³ These images taught and reinforced racist ideology and worried some African Americans such as minister Hosea Easton who lamented:

Cuts and placards descriptive of the negroe's [sic] deformity, are every where displayed to the observation of the young, with corresponding broken lingo, the very character of which is marked with design. Many of the popular book stores, in commercial towns and cities, have their show-windows lined with them. The barrooms of the most popular public houses in the country, [sic] sometimes have their ceiling literally covered with them. This display of American civility is under the daily observation of every class of society, even in New England.¹⁴

Such images, "marked with [fabricated and misleading] design," taught the young and the old alike how to think about African Americans. More specifically, they encouraged viewers to believe that African Americans were incapable of social graces, intellectually inept, and

¹³ Shane White and Graham White, *Stylin': African American Expressive Culture from Its Beginnings to the Zoot Suit* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998).

¹⁴ Hosea Easton, *A Treatise on the Intellectual Character and Civil and Political Condition of the Colored People of the U. States; And the Prejudice Exercised Towards Them: with a Sermon on the Duty of the Church to Them* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1837), 41-42.

unworthy of the rights that white Americans enjoyed. Available to be viewed on the street and in the parlor of one's home, the images occupied spaces available to men and women of all ages.



Figure 1-1. Edward Williams Clay, "Life in Philadelphia" series. Plate 4. 1830.
Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

The most popular of these derogatory images found in the home were the "Life in Philadelphia" prints created by Philadelphia artist Edward Clay between 1828 and 1830 that mocked white and free black Philadelphians (see Figure 1-1). Influenced by the people that he saw in Philadelphia and the racist caricatures he viewed while in Europe, Clay asserted that African Americans merely aspired to, and did not deserve, respect within the United States.¹⁵ One of the figures in his prints, Miss Chloe, says as much. When asked how she feels in the hot

¹⁵ Martha S. Jones, "Reframing the Color Line," in *Reframing the Color Line: Race and the Visual Culture of the Atlantic World*, Martha S. Jones and Clayton Lewis (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2009); Martha S. Jones, "Edward Clay's Life in Philadelphia," in *An Americana Sampler: Essays on Selections from the William L. Clements Library*, eds. Brian Leigh Dunnigan and J. Kevin Graffagnino (Ann Arbor, MI: University of Michigan Press, 2011).

weather, she responds by saying: “Pretty well, I tank you Mr. Cesar only I aspire too much!” Clay’s use of stereotypical black dialect, disproportionate bodies, oversized clothing, and an enormous hat perched precariously on Miss Chloe’s head signaled to nineteenth century viewers that black men and women merited a station in life that was less than that which they desired. In adopting the fineries of respectable society such as the cane that Mr. Cesar holds and the fan and parasol that Miss Chloe clutches, black men and women, argued Clay, brought derision upon themselves because they wrongly assumed that they could inhabit the genteel society that such accoutrements denoted. Though they might attempt to replicate it, their failures further marked their status as outsiders from respectable genteel culture.

During the 1830s, members of the public commonly understood images to be invested with cultural meaning while also recognizing them as transformative objects. In a description published in *Parley’s Magazine*, the benefits of engravings seemed endless. *Parley’s Magazine*, with a self-reported subscription base of 20,000 customers, proposed that its pages featured a plethora of images “selected not only with a view to adorn the work, but to improve the taste, cultivate the mind, and raise the affections of the young to appropriate and worthy objects.”¹⁶ More specifically, the magazine proposed that its images would transform those who viewed them into “better children, better brothers, better sisters, better pupils, better associates, and, in the end, better citizens.”¹⁷ The magazine carefully instructed parents and teachers: “Let children look upon the pictures, not as pictures merely; but let them be taught to study them. What can be more rich in valuable materials for instructive lessons than a good engraving?”¹⁸ Didactic and persuasive, images could be instruments to shape young people into improved members of society. The instructive influence of images was not limited to children; the actions of several

¹⁶ “Children’s Department Parley’s Magazine,” *Emancipator* (New York, NY), February 18, 1834, 4.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

abolitionist institutions revealed that the ideas communicated by images could arouse strong reactions in adults as well.

Images proved especially provocative to abolitionists and those whom they hoped to influence. For example, abolitionists circulated antislavery images to stalwart defenders of slavery in the South with the hopes of persuading them of slavery's barbarities. Wielding images as weapons, abolitionists recorded their intentions for antislavery images and the reactions of pro-slavery supporters in the 1836 Annual Report of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society. Members of the Society wrote that images functioned differently than did text:

But the pictures! The pictures!! These seem to have been specially [sic] offensive. And why, unless it is because they give specially [sic] distinct impressions of the horrors of slavery? ...Pictorial representations have ever been used with success, in making any desirable impression upon the minds of men, the bulk of whom are more immediately and thoroughly affected by a picture, than a verbal description. Why then should they not be used, in the exposure we purpose to make of our national wickedness? If any of them represent what does not exist, let the falsehood be shown and reproved. But with what reason or justice are we called upon to suppress the picture, so long as the original is allowed to defile our land?¹⁹

The power of images lay not merely in their ability to engage viewers, but also to increase the exposure of the ideas that they contained. Operating with the belief that images could “more immediately and thoroughly” influence people than text, the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society attempted to incite abhorrence of slavery with pictures.

Likewise, those opposed to abolitionism condemned both the idea of abolitionism and antislavery activists' use of images. One print appearing in Boston around 1833 denounced the “fanaticism” of several antislavery leaders in New York. The foreground depicts three prominent white abolitionists – Arthur Tappan, William Lloyd Garrison, and another unidentified man – who discuss the merits of purchasing linen produced without slave labor while an emancipated slave moves away from the group in pursuit of a flying insect labeled “Food” with a dagger in

¹⁹ *Fourth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, with Some Account of the Annual Meeting, January 20, 1836* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1836), 20.

hand. Directly behind the formerly enslaved man is a scene labeled “Insurrection [sic] in St. Domingo! Cruelty, Lust, and blood!” that depicts black people using swords, knives, and an ax to murder white men, women, and children. As the text on the print warns, freeing the enslaved would “drench America in blood” as a result of a feared black massacre of white people in the United States.²⁰ Noting that “[s]everal of the principal streets are graced this week with a lithographic caricature of the formation of the New York City Anti-Slavery Society” the *Liberator* understood this caricature to have the unintended effect of aiding the cause of the Society. It wrote: “[i]t is a miserable affair – not worth the description. But miserable as it is, it will do our cause some work.”²¹ The malicious image, the *Liberator* implied, baldly revealed the racism of its author. Furthermore, the hyperbolic language and alarmist fears that comprised the main thrust of the print’s message cast its author and those who shared his ideas as extremist, overly reactive, and dishonest.

The derogatory and affirmative images depicting African Americans underscored the belief that images could alter the way that people understood the multiple meanings ascribed to the ideas of blackness and abolitionism. As objects that document the debates over abolitionism and free black people in the United States, these images reveal how their creators used antebellum visual culture to package and deliver ideas about race to audiences. Scholars have mined white-authored images for information about racial attitudes in the United States, and in the process, have shown how these sources reveal a wealth of social and cultural information about the lives of enslaved people.²² Furthermore, scholars have shown how images of African

²⁰ *Immediate emancipation illustrated*. [1833.] Library Company of Philadelphia.

²¹ “A Caricature,” *Liberator* (Boston, MA), November 2, 1833, 174.

²² Some of the most instructive are: Robert Desrochers, Jr., “Slave-For-Sale Advertisements and Slavery in Massachusetts, 1704-1781,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 59, no.3 (July 2002): 623-664; David Waldstreicher, “Reading the Runaways: Self-Fashioning, Print Culture and Confidence in Slavery in the Eighteenth Century Mid-Atlantic,” *William and Mary Quarterly* 56, no.2 (April 1999): 243-272; Judith Kelleher Schafer, “New Orleans Slavery in 1850 as Seen in Advertisements,” *Journal of Southern History* 47, no.1 (February 1981): 33-56; Daniel

Americans created during the half-century after the American Revolution provide windows into formulations of colonialism, biological racism, interracial sex, and white superiority.²³ Fewer scholars have studied visual materials created by black men and women during the early nineteenth century. Those that have argue that African American artists documented the social history of African Americans and marshaled religious imagery to stress the benefits of abolition and altruistic white Christians.²⁴ An expansive analysis of the images of Patrick Henry Reason and Robert Douglass Jr. elucidates how visual culture crafted *by African Americans of African Americans* expands scholars' understandings of what constitutes the struggle for racial equality in the nineteenth century when African Americans controlled the methods of production and racial representation.

ROBERT DOUGLASS JR.'S ACTIVISM AND ARTISTRY IN PHILADELPHIA

Robert Douglass Jr. came from a wealthy black Philadelphia family that would have been the subject of Edward Clay's prints. His father, Robert Douglass Sr. had arrived in the United States from St. Kitts and established a lucrative business as a hairdresser and perfume merchant in Philadelphia.²⁵ He and Grace Bustill, the daughter of a wealthy black Philadelphian Cyrus

Meaders, *Advertisements for Runaway Slaves in Virginia, 1801-1820* (New York: Routledge, 1997); Richard Dojtowicz and Billy Smith, "Advertisements for Runaway Slaves, Indentured Servants, and Apprentices in the Pennsylvania Gazette, 1795-1796," *Pennsylvania History* 54, no.1 (January 1987): 34-71. The most comprehensive series of publications to study the global representation of black people from Ancient Egypt to the present is the multivolume, multiyear series: David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates, Jr., eds., *The Image of the Black in Western Art* printed by Harvard University Press.

²³ Elise Lemire, *"Miscegenation": Making Race in America* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2002).

²⁴ See Erin Greenwald, ed. *In Search of Julien Hudson: Free Artist of Color in Pre-Civil War New Orleans* (New Orleans: The Historic New Orleans Collection, 2010) and Radiclan Clytus, "'Keep It Before the People': The Pictorialization of American Abolitionism" in *Early African American Print Culture*, eds. Jordan Alexander Stein and Lara Langer Cohen (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 297-301. See also Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Portraits of a People: Picturing African Americans in the Nineteenth Century* (Andover, MA: Addison Gallery of American Art, 2006) for an analysis of Black agency and the construction of social and racial identity as expressed through portrait paintings.

²⁵ Newspaper advertisements as early as 1818 list his perfume business with another prominent black businessman, Joseph Cassey, in Philadelphia. See *Poulson's American Daily Advertiser*, January 19, 1818, 4.

Bustill, raised six children, with Robert Jr. and Sarah Mapps Douglass being the two best known today. Grace Bustill Douglass' father strongly valued education and established one of the first schools for African Americans in Philadelphia. Robert Douglass Sr. also heralded the cause of black education, even as white racial prejudice in Philadelphia sought to limit it severely. In 1831, Robert Douglass Sr. sat on Philadelphia's Provisional Board for the proposed College for Young Men of Colour along with other elite black Philadelphians Robert Purvis, James Forten, Joseph Cassey, and Frederick A. Hinton. Together, they worked to raise money for a collegiate school by which "the sons of the present and future generation may obtain a classical education and the mechanic arts in general."²⁶ The committee's mention of "the difficult admission of our youths into seminaries of learning, and establishments of mechanism" underscored several of the obstacles facing African Americans in Philadelphia, regardless of family background.²⁷ Overcoming these strictures motivated their educational venture.

Many dimensions of Robert Douglass Jr.'s life – his prominent abolitionist friends and his financially privileged family – hinted at Douglass' exceptional qualities. Yet the many other social, economic, and racial factors of 1830s Philadelphia set parameters that shaped the trajectory of his life. From the educational barriers for black youth against which his father campaigned in 1831 to the textile, metal, and shoe industries from which black Philadelphians were largely barred, black Philadelphians experienced the maleficent consequences of racism regardless of wealth. Robert Douglass Jr.'s occupation as an artist placed him squarely within the artisan class in which many black Philadelphians worked, though the proportion of black Philadelphian artisans shrank during the 1830s due to white employers' refusal to hire black

²⁶ "An Appeal to the Benevolent," *Liberator*, September 24, 1831, 155.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

apprentices.²⁸ During this decade, the most common occupations for black men included laborers, porters, dockworkers, and mariners.²⁹ Douglass' struggles to overcome the obstacles created by racial prejudice, his desire to foster the educational development of black Philadelphians, and his passion to improve the livelihood of black Americans was shared by many African Americans in the City of Brotherly Love.

Douglass pursued these goals by creating and disseminating abolitionist images. In 1833, Douglass created an oil painting of the abolitionist William Lloyd Garrison which is his earliest known image related to abolitionism. In keeping with the tradition of oil portraits, Garrison almost certainly commissioned Douglass to paint his likeness. The original painting has been lost, but we can envision it through the engraved lithograph of Garrison that Douglass arranged to be sold at six New York City addresses and two Philadelphia offices (see Figure 1-2). Garrison, a friend of the Douglass family, intimated in a letter written in the spring of 1832 to Robert's sister, Sarah Mapps Douglass, that he expected correspondence from Robert: "I hear nothing from my friend Robert; but I trust he continues to progress in his art, meeting with increased notice and encouragement."³⁰ Douglass Sr.'s published approbation of Garrison's election to the helm of the newly founded American Anti-Slavery Society, the friendship between Douglass Jr. and Garrison, and Douglass' shared abolitionist sentiments likely factored into Garrison sitting for a portrait oil painting completed by Douglass in 1833.

²⁸ Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 251.

²⁹ *The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color, of the City of Philadelphia and Adjoining Districts, as Exhibited by the Report of a Committee of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery, 1838) as cited in Nash, *Forging Freedom*, 251.

³⁰ Walter McIntosh Merrill, ed., *The Letters of William Lloyd Garrison. Volume I: I Will Be Heard! 1822-1835* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1971), 145.



Figure 1-2. Robert Douglass Jr., Lithograph of William Lloyd Garrison. 1833.
Courtesy of the Historic Society of Pennsylvania.

Invented at the end of the eighteenth century, lithography provided a visually precise, relatively affordable medium by which to reproduce images. Made by drawing an image onto stone or metal with a water-resistant coating, covering the surface in ink, and pressing paper onto the surface to remove the ink from the water-receptive areas, lithographs required considerable amounts of time to create, depending on the amount of detail in the image. Often created from other images that could not be reproduced, such as watercolors and oil portraits, lithographs could be reproduced in great numbers depending on the surface (stone or metal) originally chosen by the lithographer. The greater the number of reproductions, the less detail the resulting lithographs would retain, depending upon the amount of pressure required to impress the ink from the surface and into the paper. Nevertheless, several thousand lithographs could be manufactured from the original surface. Because they could be made cheaply, they could be sold

for less money than more labor- and material-intensive mediums. Due to the fastidious skills required to create detailed lithographs, one needed to be apprenticed to a master lithographer to learn the process. Becoming a lithographer often required years of training under the guidance of a master lithographer. It is unclear who taught Douglass how to create lithographs.³¹ The purchasing power and respectable reputation of the Douglass family no doubt contributed to young Robert's acquisition of this skill.

Using the lithographic form, Douglass increased not only the visibility of Garrison, but also the abolitionist sentiments for which Garrison was increasingly coming to be known.³² The sympathetic portrayal of Garrison – attired in respectable middle-class clothing and appearing intelligent with his glasses and high forehead – depicted Garrison during the year of the founding of the American Anti-Slavery Society. The production of this print added to the era's visual culture and highlighted the growth of abolitionist sentiments as marked by the founding of many abolitionist societies and publications. Douglass used the image of William Lloyd Garrison, whom people knew advocated for the rights of African Americans, as a proxy to support abolitionism and encourage its expansion. The medium of the oil painting, however, did not lend itself to circulation or mass visibility. When compared to the oil painting, Douglass' lithographs of Garrison could circulate to a larger audience, strengthen abolitionist sentiment, and earn revenue from multiple patrons.³³

Douglass made and sold abolitionist images to support himself and the abolitionist cause.

³¹ According to the lithographic prints and the Philadelphia City directories available at the Library Company of Philadelphia, there are several white men practicing the art of lithography in Philadelphia during and before 1833, the year that Robert Douglass Jr. created his lithograph of William Lloyd Garrison. These include William Breton, Cephas Grier Childs, Nathaniel Currier, Peter S. Duval, David Kennedy, William B. Lucas, and Albert Newsam.

³² It is possible that Garrison desired to counter an 1833 print depicting him and other abolitionists as fanatics whose abolitionist activities would engender black-on-white racial violence. See "Immediate Emancipation Illustrated," circa 1833 at the Library Company of Philadelphia. Many thanks to Erika Piola for pointing me to this print.

³³ *Emancipator* (New York, NY), September 14, 1833, 3 and "William Lloyd Garrison," *Liberator*, September 25, 1833, 3.

Reducing the overhead costs for his business, Douglass worked out of the same building located at 54 Arch Street where his father worked as a barber and his mother sold millinery. Displayed in the building's windows, as was common practice for print shops during this period, prints drew looks from passersby on the street. Exhibiting prints for passing members of the public represented more than a business strategy to attract customers; it engaged in the abolitionist strategy to win over the hearts and minds of the public. Sold for fifty cents there and at six New York City locations, including the office of the Americans Anti-Slavery Society, the audience for the print of Garrison certainly included abolitionists.³⁴ Douglass advertised his lithograph of Garrison in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, a decidedly less anti-slavery newspaper than the *Emancipator*, in which he also advertised the print.³⁵ Douglass revealed two audiences he believed to be interested in the image when he addressed his advertisement in the *Emancipator* “[to] the People of Color and Their Friends.” Later that month, he made no such appeal in the *Philadelphia Inquirer*, thereby demonstrating his desire for an even larger and more diverse audience. The audience for abolitionist prints could be unexpected. In one case, a Mississippi slaveowner, curious about abolitionism, purchased several pictures including the portrait of Garrison that he carried to the South.³⁶ Increasing the acceptance of abolitionist ideologies depended, in part, on heightened levels of visibility, circulation, and public discourse. Robert Douglass’ print of William Lloyd Garrison provoked all three.

Not everyone readily accepted the black Philadelphian’s artwork. In 1834, Douglass submitted a painting to be exhibited at the famous Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts (PAFA). As both a museum and school of fine arts, PAFA’s large collection of artwork and

³⁴ Steven Jones, “A Keen Sense of the Artistic: African American Material Culture in 19th Century Philadelphia,” *International Review of African American Art* 12, no.2 (1995): 11.

³⁵ “A Card: To the People of Color and Their Friends,” *Emancipator* (New York), September 14, 1833, 79; “William Lloyd Garrison,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 25, 1833, 3.

³⁶ “Calling for Light,” *Emancipator* (New York, NY), September 13, 1838, 80.

renowned artist-professors cultivated a rich training ground for promising artists.³⁷ PAFA accepted the oil painting entitled “Portrait of A Gentleman” and exhibited it later that year, the first such painting completed by an African American displayed in those hallowed halls.³⁸ The subject of his portrait painting is unknown, though there is some speculation that Douglass had painted the wealthiest and most prominent black Philadelphian at the time, James Forten.³⁹ If Forten or any other black man’s likeness graced the canvas, such a political statement about a black man being a gentleman clashed with the racist ideas typified in racial violence, minstrel performances, and prints such as Clay’s “Life in Philadelphia” series. It is more likely that the “Portrait of a Gentleman” depicted William Lloyd Garrison, since Douglass had described Garrison as a “gentleman” and already painted his portrait by 1834.⁴⁰ A problem arose when Douglass attempted to enter PAFA to view his painting on display at the Philadelphia Artists’ Exhibition: he was barred from entering the building because of his race.⁴¹ For several decades after this incident, Douglass recalled his experience with racial prejudice in published letters and advertisements as a means of encouraging patronage of his work.⁴²

Douglass’ work in visual culture was linked to his political interests. For example, an 1836 petition supporting the establishment of the State Anti-Slavery Society of Pennsylvania includes his signature.⁴³ The circulation of the printed petition and appeals for individuals to sign it reflected the increasing momentum and visibility of the abolitionist movement during the

³⁷ Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, *Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 1805-2005: 200 Years of Excellence* (Philadelphia: Pennsylvania Academy of the Fine Arts, 2005).

³⁸ Anna Wells Rutledge, *Cumulative Record & Exhibition Catalogue: The Pennsylvania Academy of Fine Arts, 1807-1870* (Philadelphia: no publisher information given, 1855), 107.

³⁹ Conversation with Phil Lapsansky on October 26, 2011 at the Library Company of Philadelphia.

⁴⁰ “William Lloyd Garrison,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, September 25, 1833, 3.

⁴¹ “An Appeal to American Women, on Prejudice Against Color,” in *Proceedings of the Third Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women, Held in Philadelphia, May 1st, 2d, and 3d, 1839* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1839), 22-23.

⁴² “R. Douglass, Jr.,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, March 14, 1844, 2; “R. Douglass, Jr.,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 9, 1844, 4; “R. Douglass, Jr.,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, July 18, 1844, 4.

⁴³ “Circular,” *Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty*, October 29, 1836, 31.

1830s. In referring to “the principles which actuated our fathers in 1780, [that] have still a dwelling place in the bosoms of their descendants,” the petition referenced the 1780 passage of *An Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery* by the Pennsylvania legislature. The Act called for “every Negro and Mulatto child” born in Pennsylvania after the passage of the act who otherwise would have been a slave, to be their master’s indentured servant until they reached twenty-eight years of age.⁴⁴ The petition reminded its free readers to “remember [that] those who are in bonds are bound with them” which referenced the racial prejudice that obscured the aspirations of free black men and women.⁴⁵ That Douglass signed a petition that contained the text “[i]n this present crisis, our cause is identified with theirs” helps pinpoint the causes he championed.⁴⁶ Douglass aligned many of the underlying problems facing enslaved African Americans with his own as a free man of color living in partially free circumstances. Free from the yoke of slavery, free black people were still burdened with socially and legally sanctioned racist structures.⁴⁷

Douglass continued his abolitionist involvement by joining the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society (PASS).⁴⁸ Several of its male members’ wives, sisters, and mothers had founded the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society only months prior.⁴⁹ The members of these organizations sponsored speeches, hosted fairs, organized fundraisers, and drafted petitions to the state legislature.⁵⁰ These undertakings brought greater visibility to the abolitionist movement in

⁴⁴ *Pennsylvania Act for the Gradual Abolition of Slavery*, March 1, 1780, Section 4.

⁴⁵ “Circular,” *Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty*, October 29, 1836, 31.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2008).

⁴⁸ Its members included many prominent black Philadelphians: James McCrummill, William Dorsey, Forten Purvis, Joseph Cassey, and several Forten family members. See Julie Winch, *Philadelphia’s Black Elite*, 83.

⁴⁹ Bruce Dorsey, *Reforming Men and Women: Gender in the Antebellum City* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2006), 167.

⁵⁰ “At a meeting of the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society,” *Liberator*, February 7, 1835, 23; “Anti-Slavery Lectures,” *Liberator*, February 7, 1835, 23; “Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Depository,” *Liberator*, July 6, 1838; “Debate in the Senate,” *National Era*, February 21, 1850, 30.

Philadelphia and, as we will see, gave Douglass access to training and patronage that inspired his production of images.

While sustaining his involvement in several abolitionist organizations, Douglass furthered his commitment to African American education in Philadelphia. With Frederick A. Hinton, James Cornish, William Whipper, and five other black men, Robert Douglass Jr. founded the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons in 1833. This literary society not only cultivated the knowledge of literature and science, it also inculcated debating and public speaking skills among its free black male members.⁵¹ Just five years later, more than 150 free black men claimed membership.⁵² Like many institutions founded by members of the free black elite during this era, the society had a strong moral and social mission to improve aspects of their community deemed undesirable. Many believed that free African Americans in Philadelphia had “progressed in the melioration of their moral and physical condition,” as evidenced by societies such as the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons.⁵³ As one visitor described these debating clubs, “the discussions were conducted with a degree of spirit and propriety, and displayed a cogency and acuteness of reasoning and an elevation and elegance of language for which he was little prepared.”⁵⁴ He also reported:

The subjects of discussion generally relate to their own rights and interests, and frequently result in decisions from which the prejudiced mind of the white man would startle with apprehension. A change is rapidly coming over this people. They are now numerous, united, and bitterly conscious of their degradation and their power.⁵⁵

⁵¹ Joseph Willson, *Sketches of the Higher Classes of Colored Society in Philadelphia. By a Southerner*. (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1841), 97. See also “To the Public,” *Liberator*, March 23, 1833, 43.

⁵² Pennsylvania Abolitionist Society, *The Present State and Condition of the Free People of Color in the City of Philadelphia* (Philadelphia, 1838), 30 as cited in Thomas Augst and Kenneth Carpenter, eds., *Institutes of Reading: The Social Life of Libraries in the United States* (Amherst, MA: University of Massachusetts Press, 2007), 105.

⁵³ “Colored People in Philadelphia,” *Abolitionist: or Record of the New England Anti-Slavery Society*, July 1, 1833 (Boston), 107.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

The three academic components that supported the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons – “an adequate library, a reading room, and a debating society” – provided opportunities for Douglass to develop his ideas of abolitionism and emigration while sharing and learning from other black Philadelphians.⁵⁶

Like his training at Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons, a long history of abolitionist imagery inspired Douglass. In 1787, Englishman Josiah Wedgwood designed a seal for the Society for Effecting the Abolition of the Slave Trade that prominently featured a supplicant slave with uplifted, shackled hands grasped together in prayer below the inscription: “Am I not a Man and a Brother?” The next year, Wedgwood sent several reproductions of this work to Benjamin Franklin, then president of the Pennsylvania Society for Promoting the Abolition of Slavery.⁵⁷ British abolitionists marshaled numerous iterations of Wedgwood’s image to rally people together for the cause of abolition from the late 1780s until slavery was declared illegal throughout the British Empire in 1833. Henry Thomson’s 1827 oil painting *The Booroom Slave*, which depicted a kneeling woman of African descent clasping her hands in prayer and looking skyward, bore a striking resemblance to Wedgwood’s seal.⁵⁸ Lithographs of *The Booroom Slave* circulated in the United States, and in 1833, Lydia Maria Child used it as the

⁵⁶ “People of Color,” *Liberator*, April 18, 1835, 63.

⁵⁷ Cynthia S. Hamilton, “Hercules Subdued: The Visual Rhetoric of the Kneeling Slave,” *Slavery & Abolition* 34, no.4 (December 2013): 631-652.

⁵⁸ Scholars have pointed to Thomson’s painting as having been based on a story titled the “Booroom Slave” by Mrs. Bowdich. According to the date of the painting (1827) and the publication date of the story (1828) first printed in the London publication *Forget Me Not*, the opposite is true; the painting preceded the story, which ascribes various meanings perhaps originally unintended by Thomson. Bowdich’s narrative assigns the African woman a name—Inna—and details her capture by and escape from slave traders in Africa. After her initial escape from the enslavers, God delivers Inna from her pursuers, and she seeks shelter along a rocky portion of the Atlantic Ocean “till the great ship was gone away.” It is possible that the story reached Philadelphia in the original 1828 edition or in the May 1829 issue of the *African Repository and Colonial Journal*. See Hugh Honour, *Image of the Black in Western Art*, vol. 4, *From the American Revolution to World War I*, part 1, *Slaves and Liberators* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989), 130; Frederic Shoberl, ed., *Forget Me Not; A Christmas and New Year’s Present for MDCCCXXVIII* (London, 1828), 37-76; “The Booroom Slave,” *African Repository and Colonial Journal* 5, no.3 (1829): 75.

frontispiece of her book *An Appeal in Favor of That Class of Americans Called Africans*. The transatlantic movement of visual documents revealed how abolitionists in the United States adopted British abolitionist imagery to fit the context of slavery in the United States. Robert Douglass Jr. was no exception.



Figure 1-3. Robert Douglass Jr., “The Booroom Slave.” 1834.
Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Douglass drew inspiration from other artists and publishers to increase the visibility of abolitionism and the sufferings of enslaved African Americans. In 1834, Douglass created an image of a supplicant black woman in the friendship album of another black Philadelphian, Mary Anne Dickerson (see Figure 1-3). Mary Anne and her sister Martina each owned a friendship album that they passed along to their closest friends and colleagues living in cities along the East Coast. Their friends wrote notes, painted flowers and figures, and embossed the pages of these manuscripts with messages of sentimental friendship, religious fervor, and political activism. These albums highlight the various networks between black and white people of both genders. A

member of the Dickerson family believed that Robert Douglass Jr. embodied the character that was worthy of writing the friendship album's introductory poem, and perhaps just as importantly, the type of person whose work would be seen and respected by later writers over the following years of Mary Anne's life. Writing in a friendship album, and especially to write the introductory poem for a friendship album, was an honor that bespoke close ties and mutual respect.⁵⁹

Douglass' entry challenges the existence of slavery on moral and religious grounds by means of moral suasion. Douglass appears to have completed the pen and ink wash drawing with either the frontispiece or a reproduction of Thomson's painting close at hand given the identical subject matter and position of the figure. Four lines of calligraphic text resided under the image.

They read:

When the grim lion urged his cruel chace,
When the stern panther sought his midnight prey,
What fate reserved me for this Christian race?
A race more polished, more severe than they!⁶⁰

These lines, taken from a longer poem composed by an Englishman, William Shenstone, directly referenced slavery in the original 1744 verses.⁶¹ Douglass' pairing of the poem with the image chastised Christians who either own slaves themselves or tacitly support the institution of slavery by allowing its existence. Though Douglass wrote beneath the verses that he had reproduced the image and poem "by request," he also subscribed to their messages of abolition.⁶² The poem, and Douglass' reproduction of this select stanza, highlighted the incongruity of Christianity with slavery. The enslaved woman laments the fate of her life at the hands of Christians and points to

⁵⁹ Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*, 120-147.

⁶⁰ Robert Douglass Jr., "When the grim lion urged his cruel chace..." Mary Anne Dickerson Friendship Album. Library Company of Philadelphia, 1834, 3.

⁶¹ James Basker, ed., *Amazing Grace: An Anthology of Poems about Slavery, 1660-1810* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 92-94. Thomson's painting depicts a moment from a story by Mrs. Bowditch during which an escaped slave kneels, prays, and then listens for divine instruction according to Hugh Honour, *The Image of the Black in Western Art. Volume 4, Part 2* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press), 130.

⁶² Robert Douglass Jr., "When the grim lion urged his cruel chace..." Mary Anne Dickerson friendship album at the Library Company of Philadelphia, 1834, 3.

a paradox from which she and all other enslaved people suffer: the “polished” refinement and professed moral identity of Christians, yet their ability to allow and support the “severe” institution of slavery. As men and women active in the abolitionist movement, those who viewed Douglass’ entry in Mary Anne Dickerson’s friendship album readily understood the plight of enslaved African Americans. For free African Americans, Douglass’ image of the innocent and persecuted African woman paralleled their existence as marginally free people who often fled violent white mobs and battled legal incursions on black rights.

Douglass knew well the process by which friendship albums operated to connect friends and colleagues. The timing and placement of Douglass’ contributions to Mary Anne Dickerson’s friendship album reveal Douglass’ relationship to other members of Philadelphia’s free black community. Douglass Jr.’s pen and ink wash drawing and reproduction of the Shenstone stanza are the oldest inscriptions in Mary Anne Dickerson’s friendship album. On the previous page, Douglass also penned a poem introducing the album to its future viewers. That he would be the first individual to write in Dickerson’s album signifies a close friendship with Mary Anne or her immediate family members. Mary Anne’s father, Martin, had freed himself from slavery and worked as a nurse in Philadelphia until his death a few years after Douglass notated the friendship album.⁶³ Mary Anne’s mother, Adelia, worked at the Locust Street Theatre.⁶⁴ Approximately twelve years old at the time Douglass added to her friendship album, Dickerson may have encountered the poem in the classroom of her teacher, Sarah Mapps Douglass, who was very well versed in abolitionist literature. Dickerson probably saw the image of the “Booroom Slave” and the text of the poem in one of the many copies of the popular Lydia Maria

⁶³ Phillip Lapsansky, “Afro-Americana: Meet the Dickersons,” *The Library Company of Philadelphia 1993 Annual Report* (Philadelphia: Library Company of Philadelphia, 1994), 17.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

Child book *An Appeal in Favor of that Class of Americans Called Africans* published the previous year. Though Douglass does not reveal who requested the image of “The Booroom Slave” and the copy of the Shenstone stanza, Dickerson probably requested the entry, since she owned the friendship album. The request demonstrates a previous knowledge of both the poem and the image. Douglass Jr.’s introduction wishing that “no misfortune... Befall thy Lady” and hoping that those who would write in the album would take up “[t]he pen of Genius... [to] compliment” Mary Anne, revealed that Douglass wished for Mary Anne to become better known within the networks of prominent individuals through her album.

Douglass used Mary Anne’s friendship album as a platform to reach various networks linking elite free black men and women in populous Eastern cities. Knowing that other contributors to the friendship album would later see the messages of abolition that she requested, Douglass’ art spread the message of abolition to her friends and colleagues, not all of whom were ardent abolitionists. Douglass communicated the racial and religious politics in “The Booroom Slave” to individuals – Amy Matilda Cassey, William Cooper Nell, Ada Hinton, and Sarah Mapps Douglass, among others – who later received Dickerson’s album for perusal and inscription. Through his abolitionist art, Douglass aligned himself with other prominent Philadelphians who believed deeply in the cause of abolition and rights of free black people. For example, Amy Matilda Cassey and Sarah Mapps Douglass served on the committee of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society together. Born into an elite New York family, Amy Matilda married the wealthy black businessman Joseph Cassey a few years before Joseph Cassey and Robert Douglass Sr. sat on the 1831 Philadelphia’s Provisional Board together. Another of the inscribers of Mary Anne Dickerson’s friendship album, Ada Hinton had ties to the Douglass family. Her father, Frederick Augustus Hinton, had served on Philadelphia’s Provisional Board

with Robert Douglass Jr.'s father. Frederick Augustus Hinton and Douglass Jr. had also founded the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored Persons the year before Douglass Jr. painted "The Booroom Slave" in Mary Anne Dickerson's friendship album.

The 1837 publication of a poem about Douglass' portraits of abolitionists testified to the emotive power of his images in the service of abolitionism and the artistic skill wielded by Douglass to achieve such ends. That year, two newspapers published the poem titled "On Seeing the Portraits of Abolitionists painted by R. Douglass Jr." In the poem, the author "L.A." detailed the moving experience of viewing Douglass' portraits of Elizabeth Margaret Chandler, the Quaker abolitionist author active in Philadelphia before she moved to Michigan and founded the Logan Anti-Slavery Society. She had moved to Michigan in 1830 and died three years before the publication of the poem's emotional lines:

Who can believe the limner's art
Can catch such motion of the heart?
But see where Genius' power confess'd
Portrays the feelings of the breast;
Gives thrilling language to the eye;
And to the parted lip – a sigh!⁶⁵

The poem applauds the portrait and the emotions elicited by its stunning execution. Though only the portrait of Chandler is specifically referenced (an asterisk identifies her as the "pure sainted spirit" celebrated in verse), the poem's title makes clear that Douglass had painted several images of abolitionists. "On Seeing the Portraits of Abolitionists painted by R. Douglass Jr." appeared in the *Genius of Universal Emancipation* and the *Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty*. These newspapers spread the news of Douglass' abolitionist work within and beyond his hometown of Philadelphia.

⁶⁵ "On Seeing the Portraits of Abolitionists painted by R. Douglass Jr.," *Constitutional Advocate for Universal Liberty*, November 9, 1837, 36; "On Seeing the Portraits of Abolitionists painted by R. Douglass Jr.," *The Genius of Universal Emancipation and Quarterly Ant-Slavery Review*, October 1837, 63.

DOUGLASS AND HIS TRIP TO HAITI

In 1837, Douglass traveled to Haiti to gain artistic inspiration and patronage. No less than two weeks after the publication of the poem celebrating Chandler in *Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty*, Robert Douglass Jr. announced his plans to travel to Haiti. Sarah Grimké sent Robert's sister, Sarah Mapps Douglass, a letter that read in part: "I hear Robt is going to Hayti to reside. I hope his parents can cordially approve it. What is he going to do there?"⁶⁶ The temporary condition of travelling to Haiti stood in stark contrast to the more permanent intention to "reside" in Haiti during the 1830s, especially for a free person of color. The colonization movement had attracted scores of followers and detractors, both black and white, since before the founding of the American Colonization Society in 1816.⁶⁷ Robert Douglass Jr. was not among the colonizationists; the people with whom he collaborated and the organizations in which he participated either rejected the notion of colonization or said nothing of it.

Douglass believed Haiti to be a country of promise, that is, one that held the possibility of recognizing his artistic talent without discriminating against his race. In such a place he hoped to find more people to sponsor his artwork. Robert Douglass Jr. traveled to Haiti just four days after Sarah Grimké penned her letter to Sarah Mapps Douglass. Departing the port of Philadelphia at 2pm on November 27, 1837, Douglass traveled with two fellow abolitionists – Lewis Gunn and Charles Burleigh.⁶⁸ According to the black newspaper, the *Colored American*, the three traveled to Haiti for the purpose of "collecting and imparting such information as may be alike, useful to

⁶⁶ Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight W. Dumond, eds., *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld, Angelina Grimké Weld and Sarah Grimké, 1822-1844, Volume 1* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1970), 483.

⁶⁷ Much has been written about the colonization movement and the responses it drew from free African Americans. See Leslie M. Alexander, "The Black Republic: The Influence of the Haitian Revolution on Black Political Consciousness, 1817-1861," in *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents*, eds. Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon (New York: Routledge, 2009): 57-80; Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005); Claude Andrew Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁶⁸ "Letter from Lewis C. Gunn," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, February 8, 1838, 86.

the natives, and to the friends of humanity in this country.”⁶⁹ Debates about African American emigration to Haiti had raged in the decades before Douglass set foot in Haiti. Believed by many African American leaders to be an escape from the racism in the United States, Haiti became the home of the thousands of black American emigrants. By 1830, historian Leslie Alexander has argued, support for Haitian emigration had diminished considerably among many early advocates due to several factors. These included environmental challenges, economic problems, governmental disorganization, and a strengthened push to achieve freedom and equality in the United States.⁷⁰ After arriving in Port au Prince, Douglass mailed a letter to the *Liberator* which it published alongside an editorial note that lent greater insight into Douglass’ purpose for visiting Haiti. The newspaper described Douglass as “a colored artist of great promise... hoping to find that patronage which was denied to him in this land of Christian prejudice, republican slavery, and democratic lynch law.”⁷¹

Haiti proved to be a country that provided Douglass with a rich variety of subjects for painting. In the letter reprinted in the *Liberator*, Douglass recounted the extraordinary celebration of Haitian Independence in which Haitians took part on January 1, 1838. His prose vividly communicated the joyous scene in which “people applauded,” “trumpets flourished,” and “artillery thundered” in an impressive display of black leadership and Church spectacle in front of the Haitian Government House.⁷² Fortunate to secure a prime viewing position in the orchestra, Douglass closely documented the activities of the military personnel and paid close attention to the clothing, decorations, and symbols featured in the ceremony. Douglass conveyed his deep impressions of the achievements of black people in Haiti. To his eye, “every thing was

⁶⁹ “Our Friends in Hayti,” *Colored American*, March 3, 1838, 27.

⁷⁰ Alexander, “The Black Republic: The Influence of the Haitian Revolution on Black Political Consciousness, 1817-1861,” 63-66.

⁷¹ “Commemoration of Haytien Independence,” *Liberator*, February 9, 1838, 23.

⁷² *Ibid.*

conducted in the most perfect order— no drunkenness or fighting, as with us on the 4th of July. I had never seen so many soldiers, and the perfect regularity of their movements amazed me. They were well armed, and, with few exceptions, well equipped, and the appearance of the 'Garde National' or military horse and foot, was truly splendid.”⁷³

Douglass’ laudatory words about the conduct and appearance of the Haitians subverted the negative conceptions of Haitians in popular culture. Especially during and after the Haitian Revolution, stories of bloodthirsty Haitians and massacres made their way to the United States.⁷⁴ For example, upon learning that Douglass, Gunn, and Burleigh traveled to Haiti, one Charleston, South Carolina newspaper wrote of their trip as a “silly errand” since “[t]hat fine Island is a sorry commentary on abolitionism – *a complete waste and desert*, as all the world knows, since it has fallen into the hands of the free negroes.”⁷⁵ Despite others’ preconceptions, the trip to Haiti made an enduring, positive impression on Douglass. As he conveyed to his abolitionist readers in the *Liberator*: “What I have seen to-day, I shall not soon forget; for although too much of a peace man to approve of a military government, yet the height of what these people have arisen to, from the most abject servitude, caused in my bosom a feeling of exultation, which I could not repress.”⁷⁶ Douglass assumed that many of those gathered with him were formerly enslaved people and had “arisen” to a more respectable station in life. The “feeling of exultation” stemmed from his pride in the accomplishments of these black people no longer under the yoke of slavery.

Though permanent patronage eluded him in Haiti, Douglass created several paintings that would serve him well after his return to Philadelphia. Douglass’ traveling companions, Gunn and

⁷³ Ibid.

⁷⁴ Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution: Haiti and the Making of the Early Republic* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2010), 55-56, 191; Alfred N. Hunt, *Haiti's Influence on Antebellum America: Slumbering Volcano in the Caribbean* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2006), 21.

⁷⁵ “Items,” *Charleston Courier*, February 27, 1838, 2.

⁷⁶ “Commemoration of Haytien Independence,” *Liberator*, February 9, 1838, 23.

Burleigh, left Port au Prince on April 17, 1838 and arrived in Baltimore on May 4.⁷⁷ Douglass stayed longer in Haiti and arrived back in Philadelphia from Port au Prince on July 1, 1839. The ship manifest for his vessel, the Brig Finance, listed Douglass' occupation as "portrait painter."⁷⁸ If Sarah Grimké was correct, Robert Douglass likely stayed in Haiti to search for artistic patronage and travel throughout the country seeking scenes and people to paint. Staying in Haiti afforded him the time and opportunity to visit many places in the country, meet with many of its citizens, and practice the French that he later spoke and translated later in life. Though it does not appear that he returned to the United States having secured a patron, his trip to Haiti was by no means a failure. He transported nearly a dozen paintings that he completed in Haiti to the United States which he then displayed to audiences as a means of educating them about black Haitian leadership and the black cultural institutions it engendered.

The Philadelphia to which Douglass returned was a troubled place. Less than two months before his return, the great Philadelphia Hall, built by abolitionists to host "public discussions on all subjects that are not of an immoral and improper tendency," had been ransacked and torched by an angry mob opposed to the commitments of those who used it. Funded by the purchase of 2,000 shares of \$20 by residents of Philadelphia and beyond, the building stood as a testament to the scores of people desiring a space in which to discuss some of the most pressing social issues of the day, with the abolition of slavery standing at the forefront. In the short four days that the enormous, neo-Classical building stood, many abolitionists had spoken to large crowds inside the building's auditorium, including the two men traveling with Douglass in Haiti: Lewis Gunn and Charles Burleigh. Giving speeches on "Free Discussion" and "Indian Wrongs," the two men

⁷⁷ "Burleigh and Gunn Returned," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 10, 1838, 3.

⁷⁸ Ancestry.com. *Philadelphia Passenger Lists, 1800-1945* [database on-line]. Provo, UT, USA: Ancestry.com Operations Inc, 2006. Accessed March 15, 2012. Original data can be found at: Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. Passenger Lists of Vessels Arriving at Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, 1883-1945. Micropublication T840. RG085. Rolls # 1-181. National Archives, Washington, D.C.

joined William Lloyd Garrison, Lucretia Mott, Abby Kelly, and several others during the Hall's opening ceremonies in speaking on a wide range of topics not limited to abolitionism.⁷⁹ Philadelphia newspapers praised the completion and intended purposes of the building, noted its interior specification, and documented that its largest room could accommodate nearly 3,000 people.⁸⁰ Despite the words spoken on the steps of the Hall by the mayor in an attempt to dissuade the angry mob gathered at his feet, scores of people broke into the hall, ransacked it of its contents, and burned it under the cover of darkness on May 17, 1838. Stories could be overheard in the days before its destruction that it harbored mixed-gender audiences and amalgamationists.⁸¹ The destruction of Pennsylvania Hall marked but one of the many challenges facing African Americans in Philadelphia.

The right for free black men to vote in the state of Pennsylvania came under attack at the commencement of a state constitutional convention in May of 1837. Having returned from its summer recess, the group belonging to the Reform Convention met in October and did not conclude its decision regarding the continuance of free black male voting rights by the time Robert Douglass Jr. left in December. Despite many appeals by elite black Philadelphians printed in newspapers and presented to the members of the Reform Convention, voters in Pennsylvania disenfranchised free black male voters on October 9, 1838, just three months after Robert's return to Philadelphia. The law directly affected his father and their black family friends, business associates, and fellow church congregants. Two years before, Douglass signed a petition in support of the establishment of the State Anti-Slavery Society of Pennsylvania which

⁷⁹ "Opening of the Hall," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 17, 1838, 2.

⁸⁰ "The Pennsylvania Hall," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, May 16, 1838, 2.

⁸¹ For detailed descriptions of the mob's motivations, see *History of Pennsylvania Hall, which was Destroyed by a Mob on the 17th of May, 1838* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Gunn, 1838). For more about rumors of amalgamation concerning Philadelphia Hall, see Julie Winch, *Philadelphia's Black Elite*, 146-7.

read, in part, “[i]n this present crisis, our cause is identified with theirs.”⁸² With the new state constitution of 1838, the crises facing “free” black people in Pennsylvania more closely mirrored the enslaved people in the southern United States for whom they zealously fought.

PATRICK HENRY REASON’S IMAGES OF THE ENSLAVED AND THEIR ADVOCATES

During the decade that Robert Douglass Jr. practiced in Philadelphia, another skilled African American man by the name of Patrick Henry Reason honed his artistic skills in the bustling city of New York. Born and raised free in the most populous city in the United States, Reason thrived among members of the free black community there. After his parents Michel Reason and Elizabeth Reason immigrated to New York City from Guadeloupe and Saint Domingue, they baptized the newborn Patrick in the Church of St. Peter in 1816.⁸³ Almost certainly raised Catholic given his baptism in a Catholic Church and the likelihood of his mother’s Catholic background, Reason also enjoyed the benefits of the secular education provided to him at the New York African Free School.

Established in 1787, the New York African Free School educated free and enslaved black children in several schoolhouses at the southern tip of Manhattan. Founded under the auspices of the New York Manumission Society, its schoolhouses quickly filled with eager young “children of color of all classes.”⁸⁴ The teachers and older students of the African Free School taught the subjects of Spelling, Reading, Writing, Arithmetic, Grammar, Geography, Map Drawing,

⁸² “Circular,” *Constitutional Advocate of Universal Liberty*, October 29, 1836, 31.

⁸³ Theresa Leininger-Miller, "Reason, Patrick Henry," <http://www.anb.org.proxy.lib.umich.edu/articles/17/17-00716.html>, American National Biography Online Feb. 2000, accessed June 24, 2011.

⁸⁴ Charles C. Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1830), 31; Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery*, 128-144; Carla Peterson, *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York City* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011), 66-94; John L. Rury, “The New York African Free School, 1827-1836: Conflict over Community Control of Black Education,” *Phylon* 44, no.3 (3rd Quarter 1983): 187-197.

Navigation, and Elocution.⁸⁵ The public examinations that Patrick Henry Reason and other schoolchildren experienced “had a tendency to try the public sentiment, whether it were favorable or otherwise, to the cause of educating these long neglected children...”⁸⁶ As one set of proceedings noted of the school’s public exams, “[t]he performances in writing were neat, and in many instances, highly ornamental.” The proceedings also included the detail that, present at the aforementioned public exam, were “a very numerous assemblage of spectators, who appeared to take a deep interest in the evident success and prosperity of this institution.”⁸⁷ Spectacle though it may have been, the public display of black children’s knowledge, even mastery, of the same school subjects white students studied transmitted valuable lessons to white viewers skeptical of black intelligence.

Reason’s talents and schooling prepared him to be an engraver. He excelled in the map drawing instruction offered at the African Free School. His drawing, entitled “A map of Turkey in Europe, with a view of the seraglio at Constantinople” was displayed at the American Convention held in Baltimore in November 1828. Patrick was 12 years old. Also exhibited at the convention was an essay written by Patrick’s brother, Elwer, and an imagined journal of a voyage from Boston to Madeira by James McCune Smith.⁸⁸ Just two years later, Reason’s drawing of the Free African School No. 2 became the engraved frontispiece for a book published in 1830 that detailed the history of the Free African Schools in New York City and the New York Manumission Society. Given the artisanal tradition, the engraving likely resembled

⁸⁵ Schoolgirls also received training in Elocution. “Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of New-York, in relation to the African Council. May 10, 1824,” as reprinted in Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools*, 36.

“Catalogue of Exercises from the New-York African Free School, exhibited to the American Convention held at Baltimore, November 1828” as reprinted in *Ibid.*, 68.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, 35.

⁸⁷ “Proceedings of the Common Council of the City of New-York, in relation to the African Council. May 10, 1824” as quoted in *Ibid.*, 37.

⁸⁸ “Catalogue of Exercises from the New-York African Free School, exhibited to the American Convention held at Baltimore, November 1828” as reprinted in *Ibid.*, 60-61.

Reason's drawing. The image demonstrates Reason's able knowledge of perspective, scale, geometry, and attention to detail (see Figure 1-4).

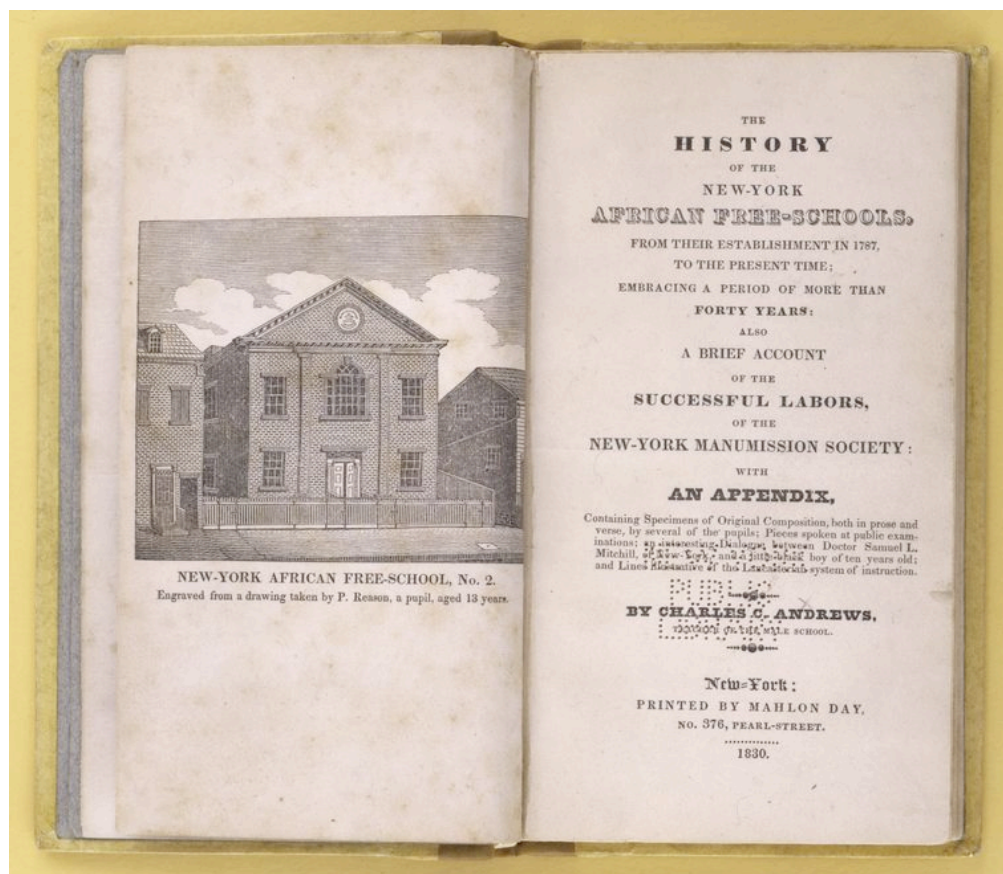


Figure 1-4. The frontispiece of Charles Andrews, *The History of the New York African Free School* (New York: Mahlon Day, 1830). New York Public Library Digital Gallery.

Around the time that a lithographer took Reason's drawing, lithographed it, and published it as the frontispiece in Andrews' book about the African Free School, Reason began training as an apprentice under the tutelage of a white British engraver living in New York City named Steven Gimber. In 1834, Gimber engraved a mezzotint in the likeness of a painting by the British artist Alexander Rippingille titled *Emancipation, Glorious First of August 1834* (see Figure 1-5).⁸⁹ The engraving depicts the emancipation of enslaved people in the British West

⁸⁹ "Engravings and Lithographs," Accessed April 7, 2011. American Antiquarian Society. <http://www.americanantiquarian.org/engravings1.htm>

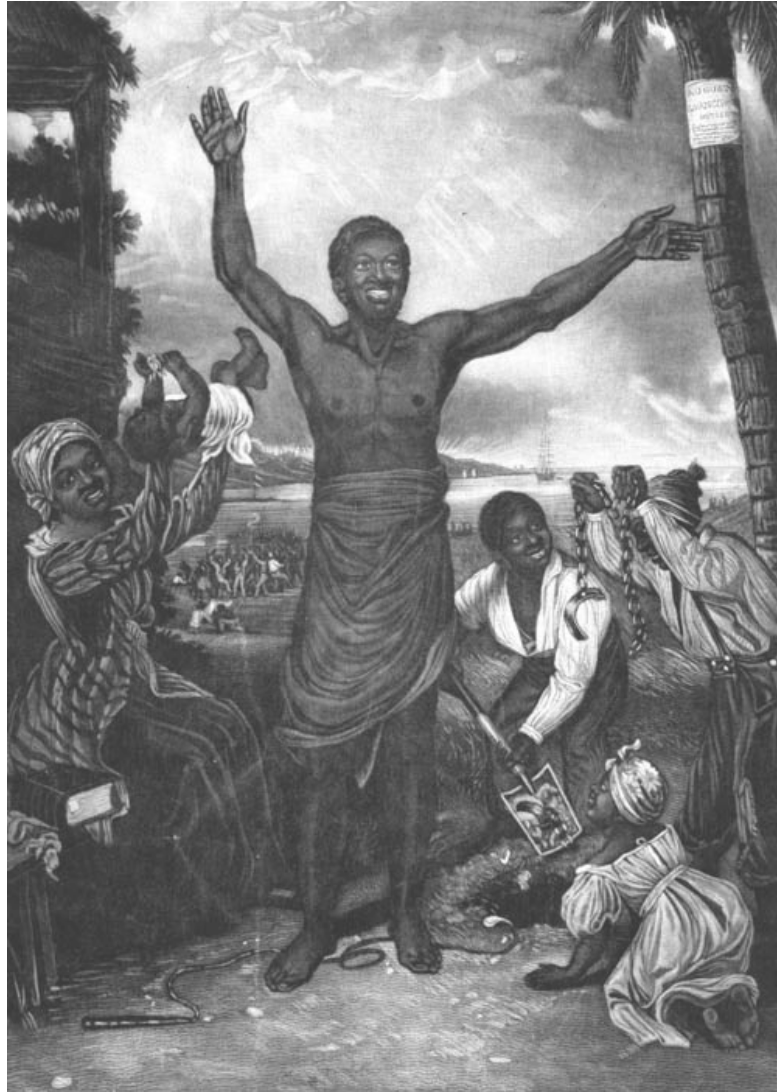


Figure 1-5. Stephen H. Gimber, "Emancipation. Glorious First of August 1834." [1834?]
Courtesy the American Antiquarian Society.

Indies after the Slavery Abolition Act of 1833. The celebration in the foreground includes black men and a black woman helping to bury broken manacles, the central figure standing atop a slave whip, and a black woman raising an infant in the air to symbolize the freedom of the youngest generation. With one of his outstretched hands, the central figure also gestures towards the notice of emancipation attached to the tree trunk in the upper right hand side of the image. His gaze to the right of upper right hand side of the image also encourages the viewer of the

engraving to follow his lead. A book with a page marker poking out of the top of the pages rests at the side of the woman raising the infant perhaps to demonstrate the newly freed people's dedication to academic education. In the background, a crowd of people gathered, and their uplifted hands, like those of the three adults in the foreground and the infant as well, cue the viewer to know that they too celebrate this joyous news. The rays of sunshine piercing the dark clouds above all the figures in the engraving further communicate the bright future and possibilities of these newly freed black people.

Reason was fortunate to receive instruction from a white engraver. Entering the skilled trades was exceedingly difficult for free people of color in Philadelphia as well as New York City on account of employers' and fellow employees' racial prejudices.⁹⁰ As one student of the African Free School stated in his valedictory address in 1819:

Why should I strive hard, and acquire all the constituents of a man, if the prevailing genius of the land admit me not as such, or but in an inferior degree! Pardon me if I feel insignificant and weak. Pardon me if I feel discouragement to oppress me to the very earth. Am I arrived at the end of my education, just on the eve of setting out into the world, of commencing some honest pursuit, by which to earn a comfortable subsistence? What are my prospects? To what shall I turn my hand? Shall I be a mechanic? No one will employ me; white boys won't work with me. Shall I be a merchant? No one will have me in his office; white clerks won't work with me...⁹¹

Fortunately for his future career, Reason was introduced to Gimber. It is possible that the principal of the African Free School or one of Reason's map drawing teachers recognized his talents and searched for an engraver who would offer an engraving apprenticeship which would probably last several years. These men would have had the social connections to locate and secure an apprenticeship for the young Reason.

⁹⁰ Nash, *Forging Freedom*. 145-164.

⁹¹ Andrews, *The History of the New-York African Free-Schools*, 132.

REASON'S MARK ON THE WORLDS OF ENGRAVING AND ANTISLAVERY

In 1836, an image of a supplicant slave appeared in a prayer book that could fit in the palm of its reader. Its publication marked the first published engraving authored by Reason. Not unlike Robert Douglass Jr.'s image of the Booroom Slave, Reason's image closely resembled a depiction of a kneeling slave created in 1787 by the white British abolitionist Josiah Wedgwood. The Wedgwood image had been pressed onto coins and printed in abolitionist literature for decades before being appropriated by abolitionists in the United States like Patrick Henry Reason. Reason's early artistic education – both at the African Free School and in Stephen Gimber's engraving office – provided the necessary tutelage to contribute to the antislavery cause. Reason's rendition of Wedgwood's supplicant slave as well as the body of his artwork raises many questions: How was Reason's take on the Wedgwood image different from the original? Why does it matter that Reason created images of African Americans? Reason's abolitionist artwork in the context of the United States during the 1830s spoke to the growing tide of visual material marshaled by the antislavery cause and its deep connection to religion.

Reason's commercial engraving career began with the publication of a frontispiece in the 1836 book *The Fountain for Every Day in the Year* written by the ardent antislavery activist, Lydia Maria Child. Printed by the American Anti-Slavery Society (AASS) in New York City, the book aimed to spread abolitionist sentiments and strengthen the religious beliefs of its readers. The proceeds from the sale of the book also raised money for the increasing costs of operating the AASS. The image presented viewers with a kneeling slave whose clasped hands and left leg were chained together (see Figure 1-6). Only three inches tall and conveniently thin, *The Fountain for Every Day in the Year* encouraged portability. Owners of Child's prayer book could easily slip the prayer book into their pockets, conduct errands, and engage in leisurely activities

in Boston, New York, and Philadelphia while possessing Reason's engraving of the supplicant slave. As its title suggested, the book invited its readers to read its pages regularly since it provided prayers to recite for every day of the year. Encouraged to recite prayers and contemplate the horrors of slavery on a daily basis, the readers of the book could access antislavery literature anywhere they traveled, provided they remembered to bring Child's book.

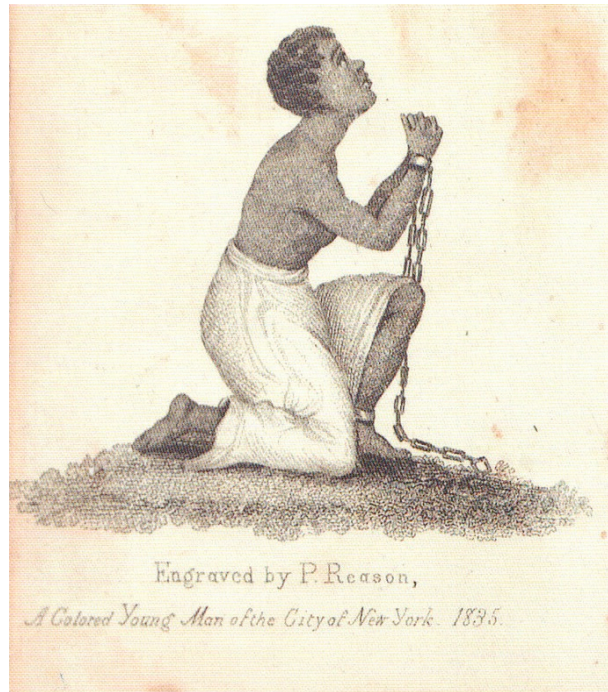


Figure 1-6. Patrick Henry Reason. Frontispiece of Lydia Maria Child, *The Fountain for Every Day in the Year* (New York: R.G. Williams, 1836). Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

A January 1836 advertisement for *The Fountain for Every Day in the Year* highlighted Reason's artistic achievement. Furthermore, it lauded Reason as the creator of the "elegant engraving" that served as the book's frontispiece.⁹² Mentioned by name, and by race, and identified as a New Yorker, the information directly under the frontispiece and the description of Reason in the *Liberator* advertisement worked together to demonstrate black accomplishment. Reason's status as an engraver, followed by his name, race, gender, and residency indicated to

⁹² "The Fountain," *Liberator* (Boston, MA), January 2, 1836, 3.

readers of Child's book that a black man living in the same city as many of the readers of the book had received training from a professional engraver.⁹³ This information conveyed to readers how the AASS not only advocated for the abolition of slavery but also supported the endeavors of a black engraver. The specificity of the information describing Reason contrasts with the unnamed enslaved figure of uncertain gender, location, and age. Race is the only information shared between the unnamed but visible figure and the invisible but named Reason. The race of white engravers did not accompany the frontispieces they created so the inclusion of Reason's race, location, and age range with his image highlighted black artistic achievement. Furthermore, the information validated his existence as an artist. Much like the calligraphic signature that resided under a lithographed portrait as a symbol verifying the accuracy of the image, the biographical text beneath the supplicant slave authenticated Reason's skill. The addition of the positive value judgment of Reason's work – "elegant engraving" – endorsed the visual product of an African American artist to the readership of the publication.

The American Anti-Slavery Society used Reason's image of the supplicant slave to teach children the wrongs of slavery. Youth who subscribed to or read the American Anti-Slavery Society children's periodical, *The Slave's Friend*, encountered praise of Reason's frontispiece in *The Fountain for Every Day in the Year*. Turning to the fifteenth page of the tenth volume of the publication, children read that Reason's image of the supplicant slave brought pleasure to one viewer who described it as a "handsome engraving [of] a kneeling slave."⁹⁴ Marketed to children, *The Slave's Friend* encouraged antislavery sentiments in language accessible to very young readers. Woodcuts accompanied each issue and frequently depicted the barbarity of slavery in

⁹³ The process of becoming an engraver in the 1830s required that students be apprenticed to master engravers for a number of years to learn the trade. The process required money, time, unique engraving tools, and the social connections to become an engraver.

⁹⁴ *The Slave's Friend*, no.10 (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1836), 15.

graphic terms. Each issue inculcated lessons of black people's humanity and the African slave trade with short stories, poems, and reprinted conversations between individuals. Immediately following the approving description of Reason's "handsome engraving," the periodical urged its readers: "Children! Go ask your fathers to go to Mr. John S. Taylor's Bookstore... of the Anti-Slavery Office, and buy *The Fountain*."⁹⁵ The description of the image and short excerpts of Child's book aimed to motivate readers to purchase the book. The American Anti-Slavery Society sought both adults and children to purchase Child's book in part due to the celebrated image created by Patrick Henry Reason.

The intended readership of Child's book helps move us closer to understanding how the image encouraged its viewers to react. With the knowledge that the sale of *The Fountain for Every Day in the Year* raised funds for the AASS, it is likely that those who purchased the book at the offices of the AASS in New York and the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society in Boston shared the abolitionist beliefs of the author.⁹⁶ Though printed in New York City, the circulation of Child's book also included Hartford, Connecticut.⁹⁷ By 1836, thousands of members had joined the antislavery societies throughout the Midwestern, New England, and Middle Atlantic states. Of all classes, black and white, men and women, abolitionist supporters who subscribed to the *Liberator* received notice of the imminent publication of Child's book.⁹⁸ Furthermore, an advertisement in *The Slave's Friend* hinted at not only the AASS' desire for children to purchase and read the book, but also educate their fathers about the book.

The ambiguous elements of Reason's kneeling enslaved figure broadened the appeal of the image. The kneeling enslaved figure whose arms extend perpendicular from his or her body

⁹⁵ Ibid., 15-16.

⁹⁶ "Just Received," *Liberator* (Boston, MA), March 26, 1836, 52.

⁹⁷ "New Books," *Patriot and Eagle* (Hartford, CT), March 12, 1836, 4.

⁹⁸ Augusta Rohrbach, "'Truth Stronger and Stranger than Fiction': Reexamining William Lloyd Garrison's *Liberator*," *American Literature* 73, no.4 (December 2001): 727-755.

and bend upward at the elbows with clasped hands together encouraged viewers of the image to believe that the enslaved figure was deep in prayer. It was an image familiar to many viewers because antislavery activists had reproduced versions of it for more than half a century.⁹⁹ The upturned head and raised eyes of the figure suggest that the enslaved person looks to the heavens while praying. Given the figure's bound hands and leg, the image suggests to viewers that the figure may be praying to God to be released from the bonds of slavery. The gender of the enslaved figure is ambiguous thus allowing viewers to imagine the person to stand in for both enslaved men and women.¹⁰⁰ Likewise, viewers could imagine the person to be of nearly any age due to the figure's indiscernible age. The lack of a background isolates the enslaved figure on a small patch of earth which results in an image that is not geographically or environmentally identifiable. The ambiguous gender, age, and location of the enslaved person allowed the viewer to interpret the figure in many ways – young, middle age, man, woman, on a plantation, in a church, in Virginia, in Georgia, etc. The viewers' collective interpretations resulted in an image that represented not all, but a majority of enslaved people in the U.S. South. Viewers of the image could be certain, however, of one crucial element of the image: the readily identifiable chains that bound his or her wrists and leg.

Reason's image became a personal appeal to the viewer of the image to aid in the cause of abolition. Given the context of Child's book as religious in nature and abolitionist in sentiment, the image of the supplicant slave functions on several emotional registers. By purchasing the

⁹⁹ Cynthia S. Hamilton, "Hercules Subdued: The Visual Rhetoric of the Kneeling Slave," *Slavery & Abolition* 34, no.4 (December 2013): 631-652; Maurie D. McInnis, *Slaves Waiting for Sale: Abolitionist Art and the American Slave Trade* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 31-50; Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁰⁰ The gender of the genuflecting figure cannot be discerned from the engraving. It is clear that the figure does not wear a shirt, but due to the lack of text and the figure's arm, which obscures the figure's chest, the gender of the enslaved person cannot be determined. Furthermore, abolitionist organizations used gender non-conformative images of supplicant slaves and altered the text above the figure e.g. "Am I Not A Man and a Brother?" and "Am I Not A Woman and Sister?" to signify the gender of the enslaved person. Reason's image contains no such text.

book, the buyer actively contributed to the antislavery effort by raising money for an enormous and powerful anti-slavery organization. When viewed by religious individuals in the North who purchased the book to support the cause of abolition, the image worked to produce emotions of sympathy for enslaved people and perhaps shame and anger over the existence of the slavery. Furthermore, given the Scripture and abolitionist sentiments adorning each page, many of the buyers desiring fulfillment from the prayer also viewed antislavery messages.¹⁰¹ Pairing the image of a supplicant slave with daily prayers and antislavery sentiments, Child's book supplied an enslaved face and body to which readers could ascribe their spiritual petitions. The purchase of the book coupled with the possible emotions of anger, shame, and anger led to the second emotive level – personal motivation – communicated by Reason's supplicant slave. Viewers could envision the image of the kneeling slave as imploring not God, but them – the owner of the book – to release them from servitude. The purchaser of the book supported the cause of abolition by buying the book and by praying for the end of slavery.

Reason's production of antislavery images included white abolitionist trailblazers. In 1836, the same year that Reason's image of a supplicant slave was published, another frontispiece, this time depicting Granville Sharp, accompanied a biography of Sharp (see Figure 1-7).¹⁰² Beneath the portrait read the words "Engraved by P Reason," "Granville Sharp, Esqr.," and "Philanthropist." The book details Sharp's role as an abolitionist lawyer in England and also contains two essays he penned to persuade readers of the religious and moral wrongs of slavery.

¹⁰¹ Scholars have written about the role of religion in the abolitionist movement and the intersection of religion and abolitionism more generally. A few particularly instructive works are Susan Juster, *Doomsayers: Anglo-American Prophecy in the Age of Revolution* (Philadelphia: The University of Pennsylvania Press, 2003), Alisse Portnoy, *Their Right to Speak: Women's Activism in the Indian and Slave Debates* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005) and Jean Yellin Fagan, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989).

¹⁰² In 1794, George Dance drew Granville Sharp in pencil that very closely resembles Reason's image. In 1817, the *European Magazine and London Review* published an engraving of Sharp completed by Thomas Blood after Dance's drawing. Reason may have seen this reproduction and engraved his image of Sharp after viewing Blood's engraving. Both Blood's and Dance's images are held at the National Portrait Gallery in London.

The choice to describe Sharp as a “philanthropist” rather than an abolitionist speaks to his greater vision to eliminate human injustice. In 1836, “philanthropist” still retained its eighteenth century meaning of “lover of mankind.”¹⁰³ Given this definition and Sharp’s fervent abolitionist activism, the word “philanthropist” recognized the Sharp’s belief in the humanity of African descended people.



Figure 1-7. Patrick Henry Reason, engraved frontispiece in Charles Stuart, *A Memoir of Granville Sharp* (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1836). Courtesy of the New York Historical Society.

The visual characteristics of Reason’s image create the impression of Sharp as a noble and moral man. Its border is architectural in style and influenced by classical, European design. The border’s precise vertical and horizontal lines connect its geometrical edges. Sharp wears a distinguished coat and a frilled cravat often worn by elite Englishmen. By using the technique of

¹⁰³ "philanthropist, n.". Oxford English Dictionary Online. March 14, 2011. Oxford University Press. <http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/142404?redirectedFrom=philanthropist> (accessed April 13, 2011). For further understanding of nineteenth century philanthropy and its relationships to abolitionism, see the second chapter of Ashli White, *Encountering Revolution*.

pointillism – that is, a series of dots spaced at different distances from one another – Reason rendered Sharp’s clothing with fine detail. Such fine clothing, complemented by Sharp’s erect posture and powdered wig conveyed Sharp’s propriety and comported with his description as a “philanthropist.” Reason’s extensively detailed representation of Sharp’s face and clothing allowed for viewers of the image to scrutinize the countenance of a man held in high moral regard by antislavery activists. Such a heightened level of physical information allowed viewers a more intimate visual connection to the Granville Sharp – and by extension his teachings – despite his death long before the American Anti-Slavery Society published this 1836 biography. The book’s publication by the AASS demonstrated that Sharp served as a model for antislavery activists after his death and his reproduced visage by the hand of Reason helped accomplish this.



Figure 1-8. Patrick Henry Reason, engraved frontispiece in James Williams, *The Narrative of James Williams an American Slave* (Boston: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838). Courtesy of the New York Historical Society.

In 1838, Reason engraved the first of several frontispieces depicting escaped slaves that served to heighten antislavery activism. Published by the American Anti-Slavery Society in Boston, the *Narrative of James Williams* detailed the horrors of slavery endured by James Williams (see Figure 1-8). Williams, to escape a severe whipping, flees the Alabama plantation where he is a slave driver and arrives in New York City. The frontispiece of the narrative depicts Williams after his escape to the North. Reason produced the portrait engraving by using the method of pointillism which resulted in a highly detailed representation of Williams' clothing and face.

Reason's engraving of Williams communicated the escaped slave's worthiness to be recognized as a respectable person and not a piece of property. In contrast to the ambiguity of Reason's image of supplicant slave, Williams faces the viewer and Reason represents him as a specific, identifiable person. Reason engraved highlights and shadows on Reason's wrinkled brow, the tip of his nose, and beneath his chin to suggest the presence of a light source illuminating Williams from above. Such a technique was common in portrait oil painting, a medium of art often associated with respectable sitters. Furthermore, Williams' attire – the layered waistcoat, vest, shirt, and cravat – readily communicated middle or upper class status to viewers because of the money required to purchase such clothing. Such a proper image of a black man, and especially a black man who had until very recently been enslaved, clashed with the cultural forms claiming to represent blackness in the 1830s.¹⁰⁴ His attire, non-caricatured facial features, proper posture, and light-hearted facial expression did not conform to the derogatory images depicting African Americans common during this era.

¹⁰⁴ For negative representations of African Americans during the 1830s, see Lemire, "Miscegenation"; W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from Jim Crow to Hip Hop* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998).

Furthermore, in contrast to the black dialect commonly used to mock African Americans, those who picked up James Williams' tale of escape read a book written in the first person that was free of stereotypical black dialect. The book's preface made clear the importance of language:

The Editor is fully aware that he has not been able to present this affecting narrative in the simplicity and vivid freshness with which it fell from the lips of the narrator. He has, however, as closely as possible, copied his manner, and in many instances his precise language. THE SLAVE HAS SPOKEN FOR HIMSELF.¹⁰⁵

This preoccupation with orality simultaneously highlighted the educational deprivation resulting from slavery and the oral self-representation of Williams himself. It also distinguished Williams from the derogatory cultural forms of blackness common during the 1830s. The image and the text worked together by presenting James Williams, a newly free man, as an individual not meant to be for white entertainment – unlike blackface minstrelsy and caricatured prints. Instead, a book published by an established abolitionist organization about a man very recently held in bondage demonstrated to readers that the abolition of slavery throughout the United States could result in finely dressed, thoughtful, and educated black men and women.

A controversy over the *Narrative of James Williams* illustrated the powerful potential for an image to confirm or repudiate the authenticity of one's enslavement. Unsurprisingly, Southern newspaper editors doubted the veracity of Williams' narrative. The abolitionist newspaper, the *Emancipator*, responded: "The portrait [created by Reason] also is a very perfect likeness of the man, and may help confirm or refute his story."¹⁰⁶ Reason's frontispiece itself, imagined the journalist writing from the *Emancipator*, could aid in settling the authenticity of James Williams'

¹⁰⁵ James Williams, *The Narrative of James Williams an American Slave* (Boston: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1838), xviii-xix.

¹⁰⁶ "We have been politely favored," *The Emancipator*, April 19, 1938, 199.

entire life story.¹⁰⁷ The writer's words also pointed to the conflation of an image with a narrative. As such, the image of Williams stood in for his story of slavery. The journalist argued that Reason's image of Williams was simultaneously evidence for both abolitionists and pro-slavery advocates. On the one hand, Williams' portrait validated not merely his story, but his very existence. On the other hand, if no one could identify Williams by Reason's "very perfect likeness" as having been an enslaved man, the image could rebut Williams' narrative.

The question still remains: how could an image confirm or refute a story? In the case of James Williams, the answer depended on whether or not the image confirmed or conflicted with the viewer's assumptions about James Williams once being enslaved. Was the image of James Williams believable? In other words, given the totality of his appearance – including his clothes and demeanor – did viewers believe that this could be a *real*, formerly enslaved man? Some, like one reader of the *Liberator* whose response to James Williams' frontispiece was published, trusted that Reason's image of Williams accurately represented a formerly enslaved man. As Lara Langer Cohen has argued, readers of the narrative initially believed Williams' tale in part because they erroneously conflated the written text and the physical bodies of escaped slaves.¹⁰⁸ In this case, Reason's image of Williams gave life to the idea of Williams' purported enslavement. As one viewer wrote, "James Williams is a reality. That fine portrait, bearing on it the sad impress of soul-conquering slavery, is the picture of a real MAN."¹⁰⁹ This viewer believed that the image not only validated Williams' story, but his very existence. Furthermore, the reader claimed to see beyond the genteel clothing and demeanor donned by Williams into the

¹⁰⁷ See Ann Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2002) for more information about how certain narratives strove to be claimed as "authentic" and how readers, editors, and images conferred authenticity to the text of the work.

¹⁰⁸ Lara Langer Cohen, *The Fabrication of American Literature: Fraudulence and Antebellum Print Culture* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 127-128.

¹⁰⁹ Hampden, "Political Hints," *The Liberator*, March 23, 1838, 46 and "James Williams in Every Family," *The Emancipator*, April 12, 1838, 194.

“soul-conquering slavery” of Williams’ past. This process demonstrates that even in spite of the markers of freedom from slavery (such as Williams’ clothing), viewers crafted their own beliefs about the identity and interiority of those depicted in images. That they did so reveals how viewers interacted with images and how they derived and structured meaning from them.

The written words of the viewer of Williams’ image elucidated how the image factored into the process of racialized meaning making. “That fine portrait,” wrote the viewer, acted as the foundation on which was built “the sad impress of soul-conquering slavery.” The “sad impress” refers to the facial expression that the viewer believed Williams to convey in the portrait. The viewer’s interpretation of Williams’ facial expression then linked that expression with what he or she believed to be Williams’ story of slavery. For that viewer, the facial expression from the image authenticated Williams’ experience of slavery. In spite of the “soul-conquering” descriptions of slavery contained within his narrative, the portrait of Williams led the viewer to believe that Williams was “a real MAN.” More broadly, it declared that enslaved people were human beings and not chattel. Abolitionists frequently adopted this strategy to convince others to join the cause of abolitionism by emphasizing the humanity of enslaved people. Doing so resisted the notion that enslaved people were merely chattel. Reason’s image of Williams prompted the writer in the *Liberator* to identify Williams not as property, but as human. The viewer’s words testify to the firm belief that the portrait authenticates both Williams’ humanity and his formerly enslaved status.

The ideas of black humanity, black respectability, and antislavery conveyed in Reason’s portrait of James Williams clashed with derogatory visual material depicting African Americans created soon thereafter. In 1839, one year after the publication of the *Narrative of James Williams*, Edward Clay printed his “Practical Amalgamation” series (see Figure 1-9). One of the

seven prints in this series, the eponymous *Practical Amalgamation*, depicts two interracial couples kissing on a bench while portraits of three white abolitionists – Arthur Tappan, Daniel O’Connell, and John Quincy Adams – hang on the parlor wall behind them. They look down from the wall with the effect of condoning the rude interracial sexuality on display below them. Each of the images in the “Practical Amalgamation” series allegedly foreshadowed or depicted the results of interracial sex. The logic of the print assumes that the abolition of slavery would result in sexual relations across the color line. The result would be, in one of the crudest words of the era, the “mongrelization” of the human species as symbolized in the print by the intermingling of the two animals in the left corner of the print. In communicating this sexual fear, the print functioned on visual registers that linked it to other culturally derogative forms of



Figure 1-9. Edward Williams Clay, *Practical Amalgamation*, 1839.
Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

blackness. The banjo held by the black man in the print at once referenced the banjos with which blackface minstrels regaled their audiences and also acted as a metaphorical phallus given Clay’s

placement of the instrument near the black man's lap.¹¹⁰ Clay's "Practical Amalgamation" print cast African Americans as lecherous and grotesquely bestial while Reason spurned these invectives and portrayed escaped slaves as respectable people worthy of the freedom that they had achieved by escape.



Figure 1-10. Frontispiece engraved by Patrick Henry Reason in Peter Wheeler, *Chains and Freedom, or, The Life and Adventures of Peter Wheeler* (New York: E.S. Arnold & Co. 1839)

In 1839, a New York printer published another image of an escaped slave engraved by Reason that encouraged close study of his face. The frontispiece depicted a man named Peter

¹¹⁰ Lemire, "Miscegenation," 99.

Wheeler and accompanied his tale of slavery and escape entitled *Chains and Freedom, or, The Life and Adventures of Peter Wheeler*. Unlike the averted eyes of James Williams, the engraving of Wheeler shows him looking directly at the viewer (see Figure 1-10). The engraving reveals that the amount of detail decreases as the viewer moves his or her eye from the top to the bottom of the image, suggesting that Reason spent more time and effort engraving Wheeler's head and face than the clothes he wears. This can be seen in the very meticulous pointillist rendering of the wrinkles in his forehead, his tightly curled hair, his facial features, even the bit of hair beneath his lip. Turned so that he is almost squarely facing the viewer, Wheeler wears a partially unbuttoned coat that has a high collar. His direct eye contact with the viewer, the greater level of detail in his face, and the contrast between his dark hair and jacket with his comparatively lighter-complexioned skin encouraged readers to study his face.¹¹¹

Reason rendered the faces of Wheeler and Williams visually distinct from the caricatured, stereotyped images of black people circulating in U.S. culture with unique faces particular to their person and their life histories. Scientists, philosophers, and anatomists had obsessed over the facial and cranial structures of primates, namely humans and apes. As historian Elise Lemire points out, these scientists “substantiate[d] the perception that whites, blacks, and nonhuman primates are in a hierarchical relationship to one another.”¹¹² She goes on to show how “blacks were repeatedly drawn in profile by *scientists and artists* alike with what are now recognized to be exaggerated facial angles in order to make the point that blacks are related to nonhuman primates.”¹¹³ In the April 7, 1849 edition of the anti-slavery newspaper the *North Star*, Frederick

¹¹¹ As denoted by the caption "J.W. Evans pinxt" below and to the right of Wheeler's coat, Patrick Henry Reason engraved his image of Wheeler from a painting completed by J.W. Evans.

¹¹² Lemire, 99-100.

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 100. Emphasis mine. For more examples of how scientific racism propagated by British, French, and German thinkers during and before the nineteenth century sought to align African descended people with primates while distancing Anglo Americans from primates, see Michelle Wright, *Becoming Black: Creating Identity in the*

Douglass wrote about scientific racism and the importance that images had long held in shaping viewers' conceptions of race. He lamented: "it seems to us next to impossible for white men to take likenesses of black men, without most grossly exaggerating their distinctive features."¹¹⁴ To him, the "reason [was] obvious," namely that "artists, like all other white persons have adopted a theory respecting the distinctive features of negro physiomy [sic]."¹¹⁵ Douglass argued that the racial prejudice held by white artists acted as a strong "temptation to make the likeness of the *negro*, rather than of the *man*."¹¹⁶ Douglass' distinction between *negro* and *man* demonstrates that he believed white artists to implement a visual vocabulary of race reliant on racial stereotypes. The resulting image As such, Douglass lamented that white artists depicted black people as an idea understood to be something sub-human and therefore innately different. Before Douglass penned this article, scientific racism had influenced the ways in which many white people imagined black people. Wheeler and Williams' portraits rejected another premise visible in many derogatory images of African Americans that people of African descent resembled apes. By increasing the amount of detail in the faces of both escaped slaves, Reason enhanced their individuality. In other words, he made Wheeler and Williams visually distinct from the caricatured, stereotyped images of black people circulating in U.S. culture with unique faces particular to their person and life experiences.

While neither the engravings of Williams or Wheeler showed the two sitters from a profile view, neither of them bear the facial or cranial attributes that practitioners or believers of scientific racism used to justify racial hierarchies. As Elise Lemire argues, soon after the circulation of diagrams displaying African descended people with exaggerated facial angles

African Diaspora (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 27-65. See also Ann Fabian, *The Skull Collectors: Race, Science, and America's Unburied Dead* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2010).

¹¹⁴ "A Tribute for the Negro," *The North Star*, April 7, 1849, 2.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.* Emphasis mine.

corresponding to those of primates, scientists and artists mirrored the trend in their images and writings.¹¹⁷ Reason's representations of these men do not accord with, and in fact reject, these depictions of black people. Thus, Reason's images of Wheeler and Williams ran counter to the images of black people and exalted them as gentleman in appearance. Their images perform the opposite function of the images of caricatured African Americans and diagrams of scientific racism; that is, they display and affirm the humanity and individuality of these two escaped slaves to their readers.

Published the same year as Wheeler's book and a year after Williams', a small periodical for children featured a woodcut print clearly modeled after Reason's frontispiece of Williams (see Figure 1-11). When the image was copied from the *Narrative of James Williams*, the artist engraved the portrait and when he inked the woodblock and pressed it onto paper, a mirror image of the original resulted. The American Anti-Slavery Society printed the 1839 periodical, entitled *The Slave's Friend*, with the intention of educating young children about slavery and free African Americans. Williams goes unnamed in the text of the periodical though his image is used to show young readers what a "free colored American" looks like. Since he was unidentified, the periodical suggested that the image of Williams could stand in for all African American men; his anonymity could be representative. As such, Williams became a symbol of blackness – masculine blackness – that extended to each African American man.

¹¹⁷ Lemire, "Miscegenation," 100. More specifically, Lemire reproduces an image published in Petrus Camper's 1792 treatise *Über den natürlichen Unterschied der Gesichtszüge in Menschen*. As referenced in Lemire, "Miscegenation," see also Londa Schiebinger, *Nature's Body: Gender in the Making of Modern Science* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1993) for more on Petrus Camper's racial ideas.

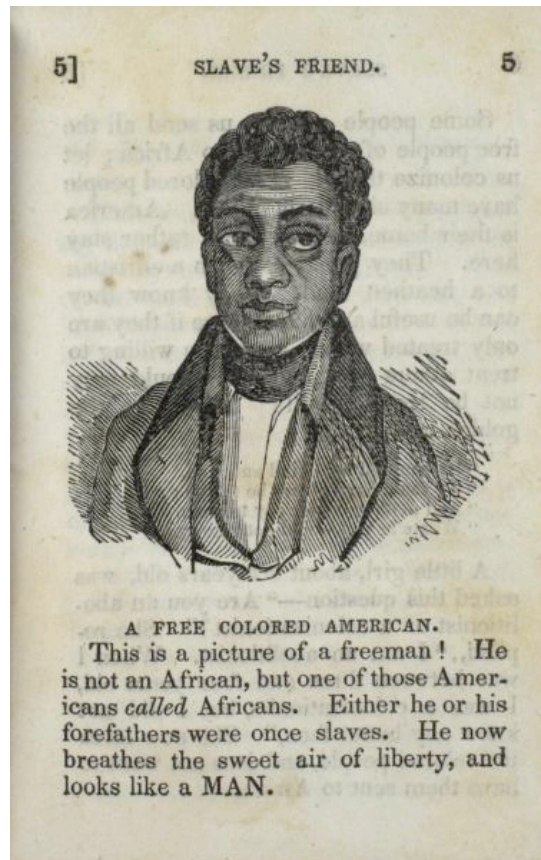


Figure 1-11. Woodcut in *The Slave's Friend*, no. 5 (New York: American Anti-Slavery Society, 1839), 5. Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

Two references in the text specifically encourage young readers to look at the image of the unnamed Williams. The first, “This is a picture of a freeman!” displayed accessible diction and excitedly identified the figure as free, and the second romantically noted that “he breathes the sweet air of liberty, and looks like a MAN.” The periodical, given its accessible language, young targeted demographic, and instructive diction used the image of Williams as a teaching device for youth. The image, paired with the text, is explicitly instructive. First, the text provided children with the genealogical background of what constituted a “freeman.” Second, it argued that a black man looked like a “MAN,” and the repetition of the word “man” suggested that indeed, the pictured figure *is* a man. The sentence and the capitalized letters of “man” forcefully implied that though some people may doubt a black man is indeed a man (that is, as equally a

man as a white man), students should know otherwise. Given this language and its ideological aims, the *Slave's Friend* and other abolitionist material provoked a strong reaction among pro-slavery citizens of Charleston, South Carolina. They confiscated and then destroyed issues of the *Slave's Friend* and several editions of the *Emancipator* and the *Anti-Slavery Record*.¹¹⁸ Much like the youth reading the *Slave's Friend*, supporters of slavery clearly understood the provocative potential of antislavery images, especially those advocating for the recognition of African Americans' humanity.

CONCLUSION

As the confiscation and destruction of abolitionist material in South Carolina made clear, the abolitionist images and activities undertaken by Robert Douglass Jr. and Patrick Henry Reason were radical, controversial, and provocative. Their artwork and actions espoused ideas that promoted the rights of African Americans, both free and enslaved. Douglass, in particular, faced direct racial discrimination that attempted to stymie the production of his abolitionist art. Both men benefitted from and contributed to a constellation of preeminent leaders – black and white, men and women – that constantly shaped the trajectory of the antislavery movement in the United States. The art of Douglass and Reason demonstrated their knowledge of abolitionist literature, fluency in abolitionist imagery, and skill as artists. They marshaled their talents to viewers and readers of abolitionist literature with images of African Americans that displayed and celebrated their humanity. In doing so, these men waged a cultural war on stereotypical images of black people during the 1830s. Their work offered different visual forms of blackness to nineteenth century audiences than those displayed on the streets, in taverns and parlors, and on the minstrel stage. Black men rarely wielded control over depictions of black people during the

¹¹⁸ R.G. Williams, "Suppressed Newspapers, &c. at Charleston," *Liberator*, August 22, 1835, 135.

1830s, but Reason and Douglass rose to prominence during the 1830s by depicting these people without the caricatured characteristics popular during the period. Their work expands our understanding of what constitutes the struggle for racial equality in the nineteenth century. Their images showed thousands of men, women, and children types of blackness that stressed black achievement and humanity – qualities that clashed with dominant, popular ideas. The struggle for abolition and racial equality took place not only in the courtrooms; it took place in the realm of visual culture that Americans experienced every day.

Reason's work, in particular, presented viewers with images that argued for the recognition of black people as equals in contrast to other images of black people that conveyed the opposite. The text accompanying the image of Williams in *The Slave's Friend* made explicit what Reason visually argued in the engraved frontispieces of Wheeler's and Williams' books: black people, like white people, are human beings and should be recognized as such. Such a statement denoted a viewpoint that challenged the dominant culture of the 1830s in both Northern and Southern states. The ideas and images that Reason propagated using the formidable printing presses of the American Anti-Slavery Society encouraged Americans to think differently about blackness. Convincing audiences about racial equality was not reserved for public speakers, ministers, and writers; as Reason's work vividly illustrates, the image played an important role as well. Having recognized the educational power of images, the American Anti-Slavery Society taught children racial equality using the text and images contained in the *Slave's Friend*. The AASS explicitly recognized the persuasive authority of images – like the one of James Williams – in the same way that Reverend Hosea Easton criticized derogatory images of African Americans displayed in frequented public places. The AASS explicitly reproduced

Reason's image of Williams alongside his harrowing tale of enslavement to teach racial equality and the legacy of slavery in the United States.

But the instruction of Americans in the service of abolitionism during the 1830s was far from over. Hoping to further develop his skills as an artist, Robert Douglass Jr. applied for a passport in 1839 to travel abroad. The government rejected his application on the grounds that he was a black man and therefore not a citizen of the United States. Douglass would overcome other obstacles as Patrick Henry Reason organized black New Yorkers to fight for black men's unrestricted right to vote.

Chapter 2

“Composition[s] of no ordinary merit”: Robert Douglass Jr., Patrick Henry Reason, and the Struggle for Black Rights in the 1840s

After having ended the 1830s with professional ties to the abolitionist movement, Robert Douglass Jr. and Patrick Henry Reason greatly expanded these networks during the 1840s through their artistic production and their participation in causes championing black rights in the United States. They rallied behind, and occasionally led the charge for, causes such as abolitionism, anti-colonization, and voting rights for free black people in the North.¹ Furthermore, they marshaled their artistic skills to commemorate, honor, and celebrate black and white advocates of black rights. In doing so, they created visual narratives that advanced the cause of abolitionism and black voting rights.² Their images of African Americans highlighted black success and intelligence when scores of images of African Americans during this era

¹ Manisha Sinha, David Brion Davis, Benjamin Quarles, Richard Newman, and others have expanded the chronology of abolitionist activism and included African Americans among its participants. This chapter forefronts visual documents created by black abolitionist artists to expand further the scope of abolitionist activity taken up by Robert Douglass Jr. and Patrick Henry Reason. See Manisha Sinha, “An Alternative Tradition of Radicalism: African American Abolitionists and the Metaphor of Revolution” in Manisha Sinha and Penny Von Eschen, eds., *Contested Democracy: Freedom, Race, and Power in American History* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007): 9-30; Timothy McCarthy and John Stauffer, eds., *Prophets of Protest: Reconsidering the History of the American Abolitionism* (New York: New Press, 2006); Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1991); Phil Lapsansky, Richard Newman, and Patrick Rael, eds., *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2001); Richard S. Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); David Brion Davis, *The Problem of Slavery in the Age of Revolution* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1975).

² Scholars including Grey Gundaker and Jean Fagan Yellin have demonstrated the importance of print and visual culture in the abolitionist movement. This chapter bridges the scholarship of abolitionism and visual culture to show how African Americans themselves authored images to advance racial equality during the 1840s. See Grey, Gundaker, “Give Me a Sign: African Americans, Print, and Practice” in Robert Gross and Mary Kelley, eds., *An Extensive Republic: Print, Culture, and Society, 1790-1840* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010), 483-494; Jean Fagan Yellin and John C. Van Horne, eds. *The Abolitionist Sisterhood: Women’s Political Culture in Antebellum America* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1994).

claimed otherwise. Douglass and Reason's counternarratives to these dominant discourses of racism should be understood as yet another strategy in the quest for black rights. This struggle is often understood within the context of public demonstrations, religious activities, marches, campaigns to purchase the freedom of enslaved people, and petitions to state and federal governments.³ Douglass and Reason participated in many of these activities during the 1840s, but they also created images that highlighted the evils of slavery and the promises of freedom with the intention of convincing their viewers of these ideas. In identifying these African Americans as producers of culture and politics, this chapter shows that the fight for black rights not only took place at marches, political conventions, and benevolent societies. The fight included print and visual culture created and disseminated throughout the United States by African Americans. Examining the work of these black cultural producers expands the antebellum arsenal of strategies drawn upon by African Americans in the service of increasing black rights.

This chapter investigates the artistic production of Robert Douglass Jr. and Patrick Henry Reason during the 1840s. It also examines their work in the cause for abolition and the expansion of rights for free African Americans in their communities. It begins by analyzing Reason's participation in a black benevolent society as a means of interpreting how he envisioned visual culture to affect viewers. Close analysis of a few of his images sheds light on the various ways of seeing that nineteenth century audiences practiced when viewing one of Reason's images. The

³ Historians have long studied the tactics of African Americans who adopted strategies to rid the United States of slavery and increase black rights such as voting rights for black men. Sometimes these strategies directly eschewed white institutional assistance. See Patrick Rael, *Black Identity & Black Protest in the Antebellum North* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Richard Newman, *The Transformation of American Abolitionism: Fighting Slavery in the Early Republic* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2002); Van Gosse, "'As a Nation, the English Are Our Friends': The Emergence of African American Politics in the British Atlantic World, 1772-1862," *American Historical Review* 113, no.4 (October 2008): 1003-1028; James O. Horton and Lois Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1998).

chapter then explores the interplay of meanings in Reason's frontispiece printed in the escaped slave narrative of Henry Bibb. The chapter later traces Douglass' interaction with abolitionists and artists in London, involvement in benevolent societies, and exhibitions of art in Philadelphia. Interweaving analysis of his few extant works, this chapter examines Douglass' involvement in extra-artistic activities to understand how he envisioned his visual work to celebrate black Haitian achievements, honor African American success, and advance the antislavery cause. By investigating Douglass and Reason's artistic and racially progressive activities together, we come to understand how these individuals used their visual production to enter and shape conversations about abolitionism, religion, emigration, and tensions within the African American community in Philadelphia and New York.

PATRICK HENRY REASON'S VISION OF THE FINE ARTS AND ITS VIEWERS

Patrick Henry Reason's participation in black benevolent societies revealed how he envisioned his art as performing the work of abolitionism. Long having been involved in the Phoenixonian Literary Society, even acting as its president in 1837, Reason gave a well-reviewed anniversary oration on the topic "The Philosophy of the Fine Arts" at that Society's fourth anniversary exercises.⁴ A long, glowing review praised Reason's speech on the same topic two years later as "[p]rofound in thought, pure and chaste in diction, and novel in some of the ideas, it was a composition of no ordinary merit."⁵ Reason lectured that "the Fine Arts... draw us from the immoderate gratification of corporeal pleasures, and sensual appetites." Furthermore, "[t]he benefits and delight resulting from a study of these subjects, particularly of painting, upon which the gentleman dwelt with much force, was strongly and strikingly exhibited, and

⁴ "Phoenixonian Literary Society," *Colored American*, July 8, 1837, 3.

⁵ "Phoenixonian Society," *Colored American*, July 13, 1839, 2.

powerfully urged upon the individuals present” which would reward them with “true permanent intellectual pleasure.”⁶

That Reason focused his speech on visual artistry is no surprise. The fine art of engraving, in which Reason had been long engaged, apart from being pleasurable to the eye, he believed, possessed the ability to deliver its viewers from “corporeal pleasures” and cultivate the moral and mental improvements of its viewers. As such, Reason underscored the importance of studying specimens of the fine arts for the purpose of “true permanent intellectual pleasure.” Reason’s engravings of escaped slaves fit squarely within this realm. If Reason’s “Anniversary Oration” was any indication, he encouraged viewers of his engravings of escaped slaves to scrutinize his work for the purpose of deriving from them the immense moral and religious wrongs of slavery and engaging more fully with the debates surrounding slavery and its abolition. In doing so, viewers of these images would simultaneously avert “the immoderate gratification of corporeal pleasures and sensual appetites” surrounding them in popular U.S. culture.⁷

One such image that antislavery writers encouraged readers to collect and reflect on was the late rector of St. Philip’s Episcopal Church in New York City, the Reverend Peter Williams. In 1841, a letter published in the *Colored American* praised Reason’s steel plate portrait engraving of Rev. Williams.⁸ As a staunch advocate of funding black schools, abolishing slavery, and rejecting colonization schemes by the end of his life, Rev. Williams served his African American parish which included “a large congregation, and about 350 communicants.”⁹ Nearly a year after his death in October 1840, a committee at St. Philip’s sent Reason’s engraving of Rev.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ “Likeness of the Late Rev. Peter Williams,” *Colored American*, September 4, 1841, 105.

⁹ “Colored Churches in This City,” *Colored American*, March 28, 1840, 2 & “Rev. Peter Williams,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, October 29, 1840, 83. Before having rejected plans for black emigration beyond the borders of the United States, Rev. Williams had supported emigration efforts especially due to racial violence. For more, see John H. Hewitt, “Peter Williams, Jr.: New York’s First African-American Episcopal Priest,” *New York History* 79, no.2 (April 1998): 101-129.

Williams to the office of the *Colored American*. The images impressed the editor, Charles B. Ray, and his published letter of thanks provided some clues as to how viewers of the portrait could display it and contemplate its subject. In addition to complimenting Reason “who has displayed, in the workmanship, very great taste, as well as having given a most accurate and perfect likeness [of Rev. Williams],” a writer for the *Colored American* wrote that he could imagine owners of the portrait to “be glad to have their parlors graced with his profile.”¹⁰ The parlor, the area of the house used to receive and entertain guests as well as the space designated for personal and family activities, served as a prime place for the portrait’s exhibition, where it could be enjoyed by visitors and residents alike. “Certainly, no member of St. Philip's Church or congregation will suffer many days, certainly not weeks, to elapse,” Ray continued, “without possessing themselves of a likeness of their long, faithful and devoted pastor.”¹¹

As such, the portrait benefitted those members of the St. Philip’s congregation that survived Rev. Williams (see Figure 2-1). The image of the deceased clergyman, Ray assumed, provided its viewers with solace and comfort because of its ability to preserve Rev. Williams in the land of the living. Since the published letter implies that Reason completed the portrait nearly a year after Rev. Williams’ death, the portrait resurrected and reified his memory in physical, collectible form. The image, after all, evoked not only his appearance but also his widely known qualities of devotion to his congregation and New York’s African American population. The image served as a reminder of his life’s work. It could be collected and displayed as a tool of remembrance, and it was likely that those who purchased the print knew Rev. Williams or knew of his work for social justice.

¹⁰ “Likeness of the Late Rev. Peter Williams,” *Colored American*, September 4, 1841, 105.

¹¹ *Ibid.*

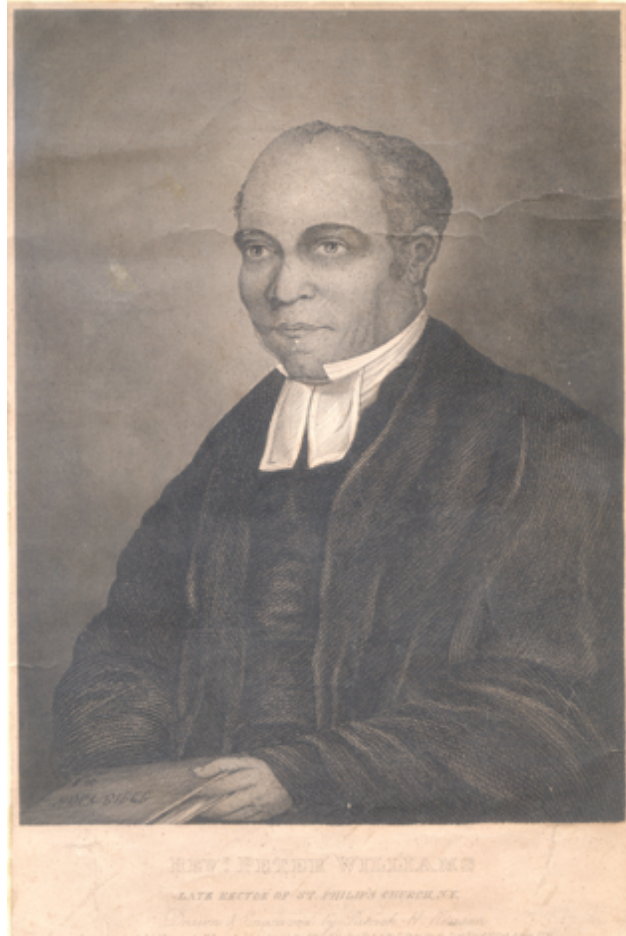


Figure 2-1. Patrick Henry Reason, Lithograph of the Reverend Peter Williams. 1841.
Courtesy of the Moorland-Spangarn Research Center

The editor of the *Colored American* also envisioned the portrait to influence those not belonging to St. Philip’s Church or congregation. Ray recommended to readers of his newspapers that “no acquaintance, who saw or appreciated the excellencies and the virtues of the man, but will be glad to have their parlors graced with his profile.”¹² His words illuminate how individuals in the nineteenth century imagined the reasons for which others would purchase and display images. The image was not merely commemorative; it enabled individuals to remember the causes Rev. Williams supported such as abolitionism, the education of black children, and the support of women leaders in the antislavery movement. His portrait acted as a portal through

¹² Ibid.

which viewers of the image could engage with the issues and virtues dearest to him. That viewers of the portrait needed to know Rev. Williams was irrelevant; merely those who “*appreciated* the excellencies and the virtues” he held and exhibited were apt, the writer wrote, to benefit from the portrait.¹³

Portraits of African American clergymen had a long history by the time that Reason engraved his portrait of Rev. Williams. Completed by white artists and engravers, these images lacked elements of racial caricature, and instead depicted these religious men as pious, capable, respectable leaders.¹⁴ Historian Richard Newman has argued that these portraits of Philadelphia’s black clergymen “challenged the racist imagery of ‘bobalition’ (or antiblack) broadsides.”¹⁵ Bishop Richard Allen, who founded the African Methodist Episcopal Church in Philadelphia, had commissioned several oil portraits of himself that engravers then reproduced. Bishop Allen commissioned oil painting of himself in 1823 – less than a decade before his death – as a means “to reestablish his image as a black founder.”¹⁶ Images could be used as tools to aid simultaneously in the struggle over one’s present condition and future legacy. The production of these images of these African American clergymen bore evidence of their enterprise of self-fashioning their status and religious politics.

Reason’s engraving of Rev. Williams established a connection between church politics and visual culture. Rev. Williams had participated in many debates regarding the rights of and opportunities available to African Americans before his death. The review of his posthumous

¹³ Ibid. Emphasis added.

¹⁴ The Library Company of Philadelphia houses many early nineteenth century portraits of African American clergymen, among them being: “Rev. Richard Allen, founder of the American Methodist Episcopal Church, in the United States of America, 1779” published by J. Dainty, 1813; “Rev. Christopher Rush,” lithographed by P.S. Duval, 1845; “Revd. Jeremiah Gloucester,” engraved by Tiller, 1828; “Revd. John Gloucester,” engraved by B. Tanner & W.R. Jones, 1823; “The Revd. Richard Allen,” engraved by J. Boyd, 1823; “Revd. Richard Allen,” lithographed by P.S. Duval, ca. 1850; “Revd. William Miller,” ca. 1840; “Revd. Charles W. Gardner,” lithographed by P.S. Duval, 1841.

¹⁵ Richard Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*, 235.

¹⁶ Ibid., 7, 235.

portrait – made available to the public by Ray’s estimation for “not more than \$1” – highlighted the multiple functions of the image.¹⁷ The review elucidated the various ways in which individuals practiced seeing and looking for the purpose of making meaning from the image of Rev. Williams and the ideas he championed. Furthermore, the review hinted how the image functioned differently for congregants and non-congregants of St. Philip’s Church. That a committee appointed by the Church of Vestry of St. Philip's asked Reason to engrave the clergyman’s likeness nearly a year after his death showed the desire to preserve, circulate, and profit from the memory of Rev. Williams.

THE STRUGGLE FOR BLACK MEN’S RIGHT TO VOTE IN NEW YORK STATE

At the same time that Reason created images he hoped would further the moral development of viewers, he helped organize African Americans in New York for the cause of black male suffrage. The New York Constitutional Convention of 1821 had extended voting rights to more white men while it stripped black men of the right to vote unless they could prove their status as freemen and their ownership of \$250 worth of property.¹⁸ The effect was swift and devastating for black voters. Only four years later, only 68 of the 12,559 African Americans in New York City were eligible to vote.¹⁹ As scholar Christopher Malone has argued, disenfranchising these black voters enabled Bucktail Republicans to deliver the final blow to the Federalist Party which had previously been strengthened by African American votes.²⁰ For many decades that followed, African Americans gathered together to strategize how to win back the right for black men to vote – without qualifications. Patrick Henry Reason joined the cause.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ David N. Gellman and David Quigley, eds., *Jim Crow New York: A Documentary History of Race and Citizenship, 1777-1877* (New York: New York University Press, 2003).

¹⁹ Christopher Malone, *Between Freedom and Bondage: Race, Party, and Voting Rights in the Antebellum North* (New York: Routledge, 2008,) 55.

²⁰ Ibid., 20-28.

Reason became deeply invested in the cause of suffrage for African American men in New York.²¹ On June 7, 1838, his peers attending a public meeting of African Americans in New York City elected Reason to the Executive Committee. These members of the Political Association gathered at Philomathean Hall that Thursday night and discussed the urgency for the right of black male suffrage. Reason proposed the resolution, adopted later in the night, that the gathered recommend the formation of other Political Associations across the state which would then elect and send delegates to a “General Political Convention of the Colored people” held in Albany.²² Reason delivered a speech along with prominent African American leaders such as Charles L. Remond and Philip Bell.²³ In October 1838, Reason attended the first Quarterly Meeting of the “New York Association for the Political Elevation and Improvement of the People of Color” that gathered dozens of leading black figures living in New York City to discuss “the removal of unequal constitutional and legal disabilities” experienced by them.²⁴ Later that year, Reason sat on the Committee of Arrangements for the Political Association aiming to enfranchise black men by signing and sending petitions to the New York Legislature urging the change.²⁵

²¹ Scholars have documented the participation of African Americans for civil rights during the first half of the nineteenth century, especially voting rights. They have shown that the debates over black men’s right to vote revealed the ways in which African Americans strategized to push for this right, developed arguments for the right to vote, and responded to counterattacks. See James O. and Lois Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community and Protest among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Christopher Malone, *Between Freedom and Bondage: Race, Party, and Voting Rights in the Antebellum North* (New York: Routledge, 2008); Carla Peterson, *Black Gotham: A Family History of African Americans in Nineteenth-Century New York* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2011).

²² Starting in 1830, African Americans throughout the United States State organized state conventions for the purpose of strategizing how best to achieve racial equality, often in the state where the meetings adjourned. These state conventions met in Southern and Northern States, from California to Maine, over several decades. For more see: Philip S. Foner and George E. Walker, eds., *Proceedings of the Black State Conventions, 1840-1865 Vols. I and II* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1979); Howard Bell, *A Survey of the Negro Convention Movement, 1830-1861* (New York: Arno Press, 1969); Peterson, *Black Gotham*, 124-126.

²³ “Public Meeting,” *Colored American*, June 16, 1838.

²⁴ “Public Meeting of the Political Association,” *Colored American*, October 20, 1838, 139.

²⁵ “Public Meeting of the Political Association,” *Colored American*, October 12, 1839, 3. For more information about the tactics to secure black voting rights in New York, see David Swift, *Black Prophets of Justice: Activist Clergy Before the Civil War* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1989), 139-142. In relation to the

Reason affixed his name to the public call for the Colored Convention in New York to be held in August of 1840. Drumming up support for black voting rights among African American men in New York City resulted in a massive campaign for a statewide convention championing the cause. The invitation for the event to be held on August 18 noted that the primary purpose for the meeting was to “obtain a relief from those political disabilities,” primary among them being the inability to vote due to property qualifications.²⁶ In the weeks before the convention, dozens of black men from across New York State signed their names that the *Colored American* then printed. Three weeks before the convention, Reason’s peers called him to chair a “very large public meeting” of black New Yorkers at Philomathean Hall in New York City. There, he described the various “political disabilities” experienced by black people across the state which he pointed to as “an auspicious sign of the necessity of the Convention.” A week later, Reason was again called to chair a preparatory meeting for the Convention in which members of the gathered assemblage offered amendments as resolutions.²⁷ Just three days later, acting as elected Secretary, Reason, upon recommendation by the committee governing the meeting, appointed delegates to represent the city of New York after the Colored Convention. His peers elected him to be one of the twenty-five delegates representing New York City.²⁸

The convention in Albany mobilized scores of African American men and heightened their visibility among the Whig party. When Reason arrived in Albany on an overnight steamer from New York City at 4:30am on the morning of August 18, he joined 39 other black men as delegates to the Convention held in the Hamilton Street Baptist Church. Elected to a business committee, “through whose hands all business proper for the Convention should pass,” Reason

Liberty Party, see: Omar Ali, *In the Balance of Power: Independent Black Politics and Third-Party Movements in the United States* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2008), 29-37.

²⁶ “A Call for a Convention of the Colored Inhabitants of the State of New York,” *Colored American*, June 6, 1840, 3.

²⁷ “Public Meeting,” *Colored American*, August 8, 1840, 2.

²⁸ “Public Meeting,” *Colored American*, August 15, 1840, 2.

and the other black men on the committee transacted a large amount of business, which Samuel Cornish estimated to be as much as “our anti-slavery annual meetings.”²⁹ By the second day of the convention, upwards of 140 delegates from throughout the state had gathered to discuss the process of petitioning for rights, electing town committees, and strategizing how to acquire black men’s voting rights.³⁰ Scores of spectators, both male and female, attended the proceedings of the convention morning, afternoon, and evening. They “manifested no less interest than the delegates themselves, and were ready to applaud debates, which excited their deep interest.”³¹ Additionally, many of the “leading men” in Albany’s Whig political party attended each of the Convention’s sessions and expressed “grave and dignified respect” for the Convention’s members and oratory skills.³²

Reason was one of the leaders at the fore of the convention. Working together with the emerging black intellectual and civil rights advocate, Alexander Crummell, Reason drafted a petition that he then delivered before those gathered on the second day of the convention.³³ Couched in the language of racial uplift, the petition requested that black men be extended the right to vote, which would have the effect of “elevating the character of the humblest members of the State.” Reason and Crummell wrote that they desired that the property qualification required for black male voters be abolished so as to enable black men’s “enjoyment of equal political rights and privileges.” The black vote, wrote Reason and Crummell, marked “the most

²⁹ “Convention of the Colored Inhabitants of the State of New York,” *Colored American*, August 22, 1840.

³⁰ “New York State Convention,” *Colored American*, August 29, 1840, 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Like Reason, Alexander Crummell had been a student at the Free African School in New York City. Raised in the African Episcopal Church of St. Philip’s of which Rev. Peter Williams was the rector. Crummell would become a leading proponent of black emigration, Christian missionary work in Africa, and Black Nationalism. See Otey M. Scruggs, “Two Black Patriarchs: Frederick Douglass and Alexander Crummell,” *Afro-Americans in New York Life and History* 6, no.1 (January 1982): 17-50; Wilson J. Moses, “Civilizing Missionary: A Study of Alexander Crummell,” *The Journal of Negro History* 60, no.2 (April 1975): 229-251; Wilson J. Moses, *Creative Conflict in African American Thought* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004).

efficient instrument of their elevation.”³⁴ After having been elected chairman of the committee responsible for a plan to extend to all black men the ability to vote, Reason proposed a system of collecting signatures and circulating petitions to be implemented state-wide.³⁵

Reason also publically campaigned against black colonization and assisted escaped slaves to freedom. Perturbed by threats of forced emigration made by attendees of the Maryland Colonization Convention, Reason and eight other black men, including his brother and the increasingly influential black New York doctor, James McCune Smith, called together a meeting in New York City in July of 1841.³⁶ Reason acted as one of the Vice Presidents of the Great Anti-Colonization Meeting in New York. The meeting members gathered at the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church in New York City to denounce the recently held colonization convention held in Maryland to which they unanimously “expressed our opposition and abhorrence of the doctrines, measures, and influence of the scheme of expatriation, viewing it as the main prop of American caste.”³⁷ Additionally, Reason’s hatred of slavery led him to join the New York Vigilance Committee. On June 14, 1841, a meeting of the friends of Lawful Liberty met by invitation of the New York Vigilance Committee at the Asbury Methodist Episcopal Church and elected Patrick Henry Reason to be secretary. There, Reason celebrated the abolition of slavery by the Legislature of New York State. The New York Vigilance Committee had, up to that date, assisted the escape of seventeen fugitive slaves.³⁸

Though busy with the campaign for black male suffrage in the state of New York, Reason created what would be his last engraving of an escaped slave in 1849. It appeared as the

³⁴ “From the Minutes of the Albany Convention of Colored Citizens,” *Colored American*, January 9, 1841, 1.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ “Great Public Meeting. Citizens Attend!” *Colored American*, June 19, 1841, 63.

³⁷ “Great Anti-Colonization Meeting in New-York,” *Liberator*, July 2, 1841, 106.

³⁸ “Public Meeting,” *Emancipator* (NY), June 17, 1841, 26.

frontispiece of the *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb* (see Figure 2-2).³⁹ Bibb had escaped from slavery and quickly rose to prominence among antislavery groups as a powerful orator and advocate for the abolition of slavery. Like Reason, Bibb attended conventions of free black people that convened to advance the cause of black rights. He became a national figure due to his peripatetic work on behalf of the Liberty Party and his antislavery engagements throughout the country.⁴⁰



Figure 2-2. Patrick Henry Reason. Frontispiece to the *Narrative of the Life and Adventures of Henry Bibb*. 1849.

³⁹ Bibb had escaped from slavery several years before the publication of the book and had risen to fame by speaking at several abolitionist meetings in Michigan, New York, Maine, and several other states before the publication of his *Narrative*.

⁴⁰ James Finley, “‘The Land of Liberty’: Henry Bibb’s Free Soil Geographies,” *ESQ: A Journal of the American Renaissance* 59, no.2 (2013) 231-261; Larry Gara, “The Professional Fugitive in the Abolition Movement,” *The Wisconsin Magazine of History* 48, no.3 (Spring 1965): 196-204; Fred Landon, “Henry Bibb, a Colonizer,” *The Journal of Negro History* 5, no.4 (October 1920): 437-447.

The frontispiece at the beginning of Bibb's 1849 *Narrative* includes two images of Bibb. Reason completed the larger of the two which shows Bibb standing and facing the viewer in a three-quarters pose. In the octagonal image, Bibb wears a waistcoat over a crisp white shirt while he holds a book upright in his right hand. The meticulous rendering of Bibb's face, hair, and the patterns on his clothing worked together to create a vivid image, almost photographic, that greeted readers of his tale. The careful work required to create the crosshatched background hinted at the amount of time and energy spent in the creation of this image. Likely a steel plate engraving due to its exceptional level of detail, the image is more finely detailed than any other portrait that Reason had yet created.

The details of Reason's image worked together to convey Bibb's education and respectability. Unlike Reason's earlier frontispieces of escaped slaves, the image of Bibb shows him with a prop – a book. It symbolizes Bibb's literacy, intelligence, and education. That Bibb grasps the book demonstrates his control over its contents and represents his distance from the stereotypical notion of black weak-mindedness by highlighting his mental acumen. His well-appointed appearance identifies Bibb as an individual with the means and ability to acquire such clothing. The pose and subject matter of the print drew on conventional visual tropes of portraiture that had its foundations in oil painting. As an engraver, Reason implemented these painterly characteristics into his engraving of Bibb.

The second frontispiece image detailed Bibb's escape from slavery. Below Reason's engraving, a small image of Bibb escaping from his owner, Henry Lane – which comes to be known after reading the accompanying text – situates Bibb in the urban slavery setting of Louisville, Kentucky in 1838. The row houses and cobblestone streets set the scene where a white man, in mid-stride, reaches out his arm to convey movement toward a black man fleeing

with his hands in the air. Drawn shorter than the white man to convey distance from him, Bibb runs toward an imaginary light source that spotlights him and casts a deep shadow beneath him. Both figures considerably lack detail compared to Reason's frontispiece. Detail in the escape scene does not greatly matter; the combined size, position, and lack of detail of the small image convey its basic message: the image shows where and how Bibb emancipated himself as he escaped the horrors of the slave auction where he was to be sold.

Analyzing both frontispiece images and the accompanying text underscores how Bibb's distance – literally and metaphorically – from slavery is also made plain to the image's viewer. The two images worked as a chronological sequence. The bottom image depicts the speed and intensity of Bibb's moment of escape. Studied in isolation, viewers could not have guessed the precise identity of the fleeing man. By obscuring his face, the image suggests, Henry Bibb was one of the faceless enslaved people living in the South. This is not to say that these people lacked individuality; rather, by making the figure unidentifiable, the image's author represented the millions of enslaved people who just as easily could have been in Bibb's position. The simultaneously anonymous but widely familiar image depicting Bibb's escape from slavery echoed the indistinct but discernible image of the supplicant slave that Reason engraved a decade and a half earlier. Reason's richly detailed rendering of Bibb's face in the *Narrative's* main frontispiece showed readers the now identifiable and *verifiable* Henry Bibb. No longer turned away in shadow, Bibb turns his face to look directly at the viewer. He gave a face to slavery in the United States, like the many escaped slaves whose images had been seen by thousands of people in the United States and abroad.

Though the two images differ markedly, Henry Bibb's signature between the two binds them together with a personalized mark that authenticated and authorized both. The signature

and the book held in Bibb's hand mutually reinforce his literacy and education in contrast to the laws throughout the South that barred enslaved people from being educated. Bibb's signature acts to substantiate the truth of his images that testify to his past enslaved status and his current free status. It is unclear, and improbable given the style of the engraving, that Reason engraved the image below his portrait of Bibb. Only infrequently did two images grace the same page on which the frontispiece was normally printed. Since Henry Bibb's narrative included two images, choices regarding the size, content, and position of each image affected the messages proposed by the images individually and jointly. The signature served to confirm that both images represented Henry Bibb and his history. Furthermore, both the book Bibb clutches in his hand and his calligraphic signature mutually reinforce each other to validate Bibb's literacy, education, and by extension, his intellect.

Operating together on the registers of the individual and the entire enslaved population in the United States, the images of Bibb taught their viewers about the horrors of slavery and that formerly enslaved people should not be viewed as chattel but upright, respectable people. None of Reason's images had been previously accompanied by the images of slavery on the same page. Such images proved especially provocative to abolitionists and those who they hoped to influence upon seeing the images. According to the Annual Report of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, images functioned differently than text. "Pictorial representations have ever been used with success, in making any desirable impression upon the minds of men," the report stated, "the bulk of whom are more immediately and thoroughly affected by a picture, than a verbal description. Why then should they not be used, in the exposure we purpose to make of our national wickedness?"⁴¹ The power of images lay not merely in their ability to engage viewers,

⁴¹ *Fourth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, with Some Account of the Annual Meeting, January 20, 1836* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1836), 20.

but also to increase the “exposure” of the ideas that they attempted to communicate. This strategy, adopted by the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, extended to images attempting to incite abhorrence of slavery and images that demonstrated respect for an African American such as Henry Bibb.⁴² The text beneath the smaller frontispiece image no doubt conveyed one of the “distinct impressions of the horrors of slavery” – the slave auction. This scene served as both an introduction to Bibb’s tale and a reminder that being sold, or the threat of being sold, at a slave auction was a reality for millions of enslaved people. While the narrative clearly specified the events of Bibb’s life, viewers of Reason’s portrait could imagine Bibb as representing other enslaved people in the United States. In doing so, the image of the free Bibb demonstrated the latent characteristics of respectability – including fine physical comportment, eloquence, grace, and polish – in every enslaved African American.

DEPICTING BLACK GENIUS IN ROBERT DOUGLASS JR.’S PHILADELPHIA

Only a few years before Reason completed his image of Bibb, a successful free black musician and bandleader named Francis Johnson sat before Robert Douglass Jr. to have a daguerreotype made. As a composer, musician, and bandleader, Johnson had become popular in Philadelphia, New York City, and Saratoga Springs, NY among white and black audiences.⁴³ Playing the keyed bugle, leading a band, and publishing original musical scores, Johnson enjoyed broad popularity and success within Philadelphia. While much of the music he performed was secular, he conducted orchestras playing sacred music on several occasions.⁴⁴

⁴² For information about the other images printed in Bibb’s *Narrative*, which are reproductions of images previously used in other antislavery materials, see Marcus Wood, “Seeing is Believing, or Finding ‘Truth’ In Slave Narrative: The Narrative of Henry Bibb as Perfect Misrepresentation,” *Slavery & Abolition* 18, no.3 (June 2008): 174-211.

⁴³ Charles K. Jones, *Francis Johnson (1792-1844): Chronicle of a Black Musician in Early Nineteenth-Century Philadelphia* (Bethlehem, PA: Lehigh University Press, 2006).

⁴⁴ Eileen Southern, “Musical Practices in Black Churches of Philadelphia and New York, ca. 1800-1844,” *Journal of the American Musicological Society* 30, no.2 (Summer 1977): 296-312.

Like Douglass and Reason, Johnson had established ties with black churches and black benevolent societies. Like Douglass, he traveled abroad to practice his artistry and returned home to share the music he heard in England and France with audiences in the United States. As scholar Eileen Southern has documented, Johnson “had been the chief supplier of dance music in Philadelphia for almost twenty years” by the late 1830s.⁴⁵

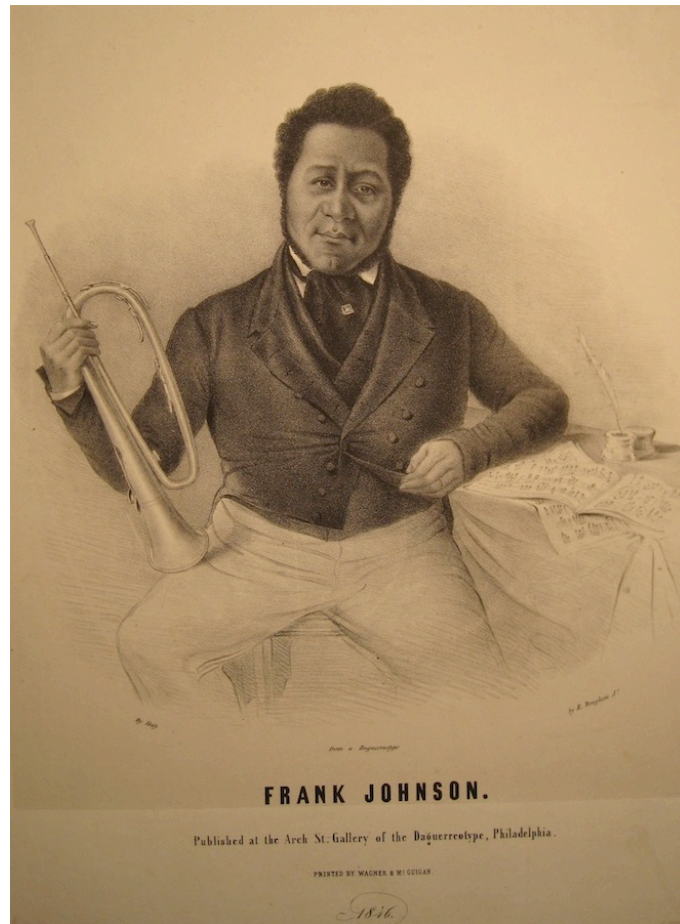


Figure 2-3. Alfred Hoffs, lithograph of Frank Johnson after a daguerreotype by Robert Douglass Jr., 1846. Courtesy of the Historical Society of Pennsylvania.

Douglass, the prominent African American photographer and lithographer who had made a living creating images of abolitionists and black people during the 1830s, made sure to include the objects that marked Johnson as a successful, educated black man (see Figure 2-3). The

⁴⁵ Eileen Southern, “Frank Johnson of Philadelphia and his Promenade Concerts,” *The Black Perspective in Music* 5, no.1 (Spring 1977), 5.

resulting daguerreotype became the model from which an artist named Alfred Hoffy created a lithograph that Douglass then published and sold at his storefront at 54 Arch Street. Though Douglass' daguerreotype has been lost, the extant lithograph gives us clues about the image from which it was modeled. The lithograph shows a seated Frank Johnson squarely facing the viewer of the print, grasping a bugle in one hand, and resting his other arm on a table. Spread across the table, sheet music and a quill and inkwell drew the viewer's attention to Johnson's profession as a composer. Johnson's slightly tilted head and the expression of ease and warmth on his face, marked by an unfurrowed brow and the slightly upturned hint of a smile, lent him an air of friendliness. His expression, coupled with the accoutrements of his profession – a musical instrument and sheet music – underscored his musical skill and aptitude. The lithograph drew attention to Johnson's aptitude as well as his professional success, as shown in the respectable middle class attire that Johnson wore. Such was an image of respectability, black success, and musical achievement.

That it existed in the lithographic medium signaled that the flattering portrait intended to be circulated among a greater audience. The fragility of daguerreotypes made them impractical to be passed from person to person. Lithographs enabled the mass production of cheap images that could maintain much of the detail displayed in a daguerreotype. Successfully copying daguerreotypes proved extremely difficult; they could not be cheaply, quickly, safely, or efficiently copied. Made with glass and/or metal, each daguerreotype was unique. They could be mounted or otherwise fixed in a public place to increase their visibility, but such a viewing experience was more fleeting than possessing such an image. From a business standpoint, the production of lithographs may have cost less than the production of daguerreotypes and the

money earned from the production of hundreds or thousands of copies of a lithographic print could be exponentially greater than the sale of one daguerreotype.

The year that Douglass printed the lithograph of Francis Johnson lends insight into the possible reasons for its creation. Douglass published the image of Johnson in 1846, two years after Johnson's death in Philadelphia.⁴⁶ Like Reason's post-mortem engraving of Rev. Peter Williams, the reproduction of Douglass' image of Francis Johnson served as an act of remembrance. The lithographic medium of this memorial allowed for that which daguerreotypy did not; lithographs of people could be created long after their subject had passed on. The mass reproducibility of Johnson's lithographic image reminded a larger audience of Johnson's accomplishments than a single daguerreotype could. In this sense, the 1846 lithographic of Johnson served not merely as a memorial to Johnson's life but as a testimony to his compositional creativity, musical talent, and prolific publishing.

On two occasions immediately following Johnson's death, Douglass publically proclaimed the "genius" of Francis Johnson. Just three days after Johnson's passing, a group of men met to mourn his passing. They elected a committee, on which Douglass served, and vowed to publish a "testimonial to [Johnson's] worth" in the *Elevator*, the *Philadelphia Ledger*, and the *Philadelphia Sun*. In their printed tribute, they testified that Johnson "eminently and successfully proved that genius is sufficiently powerful to overcome *even prejudice*."⁴⁷ A month later, Douglass delivered a monody on the death of Johnson at a musical festival before a crowd in St. Thomas, one of the most prominent black churches in Philadelphia.⁴⁸ Douglass lamented the loss of his friend to those gathered and twice referred to the "genius" of Johnson's musical prowess. In suitable fashion, the 1846 lithograph of Johnson displayed the objects – the quill, musical

⁴⁶ "Died." *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), April 8, 1844, 2.

⁴⁷ "At a Special Meeting of the Young Men," *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), April 10, 1844, 2.

⁴⁸ Jones, *Francis Johnson (1792-1844)*, 247-248.

score, and bugle – that marked Johnson’s mental and musical skill. Given Douglass’ admiration for Johnson, it should come as no surprise that Douglass printed and sold the print of Johnson after his death.

Clues about Douglass’ respect for Johnson and his fashioning of Johnson into an exemplar of black virtuosity can be found in an address that Douglass delivered at a concert held on March 29, 1841 in St. Thomas.⁴⁹ In his address, Douglass called his listeners’ attention to Francis Johnson. “The modern Orpheus,” Douglass proclaimed of Johnson, “truly, is our friend.” This reference to Ovid’s *Metamorphoses* signaled Douglass’ education and self-referenced his own mastery of classical texts. Douglass continued: “And [Johnson] will not let *you*, like the Banks, suspend –/ But for *his notes* cash payments from you draw,/ In aid of knowledge and or moral law.” In likening Johnson to a bank giving out payments to aid in knowledge and moral law, Douglass mixed contemporary events with the achievements of the black community in Philadelphia. The portion about the banks and suspended cash refers to a Congressional resolution in May 1838 that repealed specie circular.⁵⁰ Douglass’ double play on “notes” – bank notes and musical notes – hinted at his lyrical creativity. Douglass layered his epic Roman poetry when he referred to Johnson as “Orpheus the ancient, [whom] ‘e’en the rocks obeyed, And danced in order to the tunes he played.” Orpheus, his fellow educated members of the Philadelphia Library Company of Colored People knew, appeared in Ovid’s *Metamorphoses*. But recognizing a well-known character of a well-known Roman lyric poet would have been easier than recognizing two lines plucked from a lesser-known Roman poet, Horace. The

⁴⁹ For more about the activities undertaken in black churches in Philadelphia such as benevolent work, and the ways in which some white Philadelphians viewed black churches, see Emma Lapsansky, “‘Since They Got Those Separate Churches’: Afro-Americans and Racism in Jacksonian Philadelphia,” *American Quarterly* 32, no.1 (Spring 1980), 54-78.

⁵⁰ Richard H. Timberlake, *Monetary Policy in the United States: An Intellectual and Institutional History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 65; Robert Mayo, *A Synopsis of the Commercial and Revenue System of the United States, As Developed By Instructions and Decisions of the Treasury Department for the Administration of the Revenue Laws* (Extra Edition, Washington: J & G.S. Gideon, 1847), 178.

“obey[ing] rocks... that danced in order to the tunes he played” were two lines from Horace’s *Odes* referring to the ability of Amphion, a musician, to use his lyrical gifts to build the walls surrounding the ancient city of Thebes.⁵¹ Immediately after Douglass’ words, Francis Johnson led his band in the commencement of the day’s musical performances.

Douglass organized events to mobilize support for the black literary society he helped found. The address that Douglass delivered in St. Thomas in March of 1841 marked Douglass’ continued involvement in the Philadelphia Library Company. The advertisement for the events that day labeled it a “Grand Concert” and depicted a lyre, a trumpet, and vines of ivy in front of a musical score background. Addressed to “Friends and the Public,” the advertisement stated that men and women who had attended and thoroughly enjoyed a previous concert had requested the concert. Unlike the previous performance, this one included “the addition of several brilliant and Scientific Pieces” much to the edification of the attendees. The advertisement specifically welcomed “all the lovers of Music, and those who feel interested in the cultivation and extension of that beautiful and sublime Science” to attend.⁵² Every attendee also benefited the Philadelphia Library Company because the 25-cent admission fee would be used to purchase more books for the society’s library.⁵³

The purchase of books for the black literary organization’s library was one way of “improv[ing] the mind” and “providing for the intellectual development of youth” about which

⁵¹ Horace, *Odes*, III, xi, 2. See Sir Theodore Martin, ed., *The Works of Horace: Translated into English Verse, with a Life and Notes*, Vol. II (London: William Blackwood and Sons, 1881), 397. For more about how antebellum arts and politics drew upon classical texts and philosophies, see Carl J. Richard, *The Golden Age of the Classics in America: Greece, Rome, and the Antebellum United State* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2009); Caroline Winterer, *The Mirror of Antiquity: American Women and the Classical Tradition, 1750–1900* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007); Margaret Malamud, *Ancient Rome and Modern America* (Chichester, UK: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009); Eran Shalev, *Rome Reborn on Western Shores: Historical Imagination and the Creation of the American Republic* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2009); Carl J. Richard, *The Founders and the Classics: Greece, Rome, and the American Enlightenment* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1995).

⁵² “Unprecedented Attraction. Grand Concert.” Historical Society of Pennsylvania, Gardner Collection, Box 1G, Folder 1.

⁵³ *Ibid.*

Douglass spoke at length.⁵⁴ Though the study of books marked one method of intellectual development, preparing for and delivering public speeches, like the one Douglass presented, provided another avenue to education.⁵⁵ As such, Douglass' original address offered further insights into his ideological standpoints regarding colonization and black emigration.⁵⁶ In his speech, Douglass explicitly rejected the idea that African Americans should emigrate to areas of Africa, the Caribbean, and Central and South America. After speaking at length about the merits of educating youth, Douglass continued that those youth

may be thus successfully disprove
Assertions foul, of those who would remove
The native hence, to some far distant spot,
Where death from climate soon would be [their] lot.
But this is vain, no other spot on earth
Is half so sweet as that which gave us birth:
For *this our* Fathers also fought and bled;
Here lie their bones, here shall be our last bed.⁵⁷

Douglass' reference to "death from climate" echoes the problems regarding heat and disease anticipated by individuals contemplating emigration to the countries in the Caribbean and Africa.⁵⁸ Conversations about black emigration from the United States had circulated in Philadelphia and other parts of the United States for decades. For example, Bishop Richard Allen,

⁵⁴ "Address," *Pennsylvania Freeman*, April 14, 1841, 4.

⁵⁵ For a nineteenth century understanding of elocution and its proposed benefits to one's mind and body, see C.P. Bronson, *Elocution; or, Mental and Vocal Philosophy* (Louisville, KY: Morton & Griswold, 1845). Scholars have increasingly argued that elocution was one means by which black Americans carved out space in the public sphere. See Martha S. Jones, *All Bound Up Together: The Woman Question in African American Public Culture* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007) and Melba J. Boyd, *Discarded Legacy: Politics and Poetics in the Life of Frances E.W. Harper, 1825-1911* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1994).

⁵⁶ Much has been written about the colonization movements to Canada, Africa, and the Caribbean as well as the mixed responses it drew from free African Americans. See Leslie Alexander, "The Black Republic: The Influence of the Haitian Revolution on Black Political Consciousness, 1817-1861" in *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents*, eds. Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon (New York: Routledge, 2009); Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988); Eric Burin, *Slavery and the Peculiar Solution: A History of the American Colonization Society* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2005); Claude Andrew Clegg, *The Price of Liberty: African Americans and the Making of Liberia* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

⁵⁷ "Address," *Pennsylvania Freeman* April 14, 1841, 4.

⁵⁸ See Gary Nash, *Forging Freedom: The Formation of Philadelphia's Black Community, 1720-1840* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988), 233-245.

one of the most prominent members of Philadelphia's African American community strongly advocated for the emigration of black people to Haiti. He led the Haitian Emigration Society of Philadelphia believing that black people would be able to achieve the freedoms and equality in Haiti that they were denied in the United States.⁵⁹ In disagreement with the stance on emigration taken by Bishop Allen and others, Douglass provided arguments to dissuade black people from emigrating.

Douglass made clear in his speech at St. Thomas' that the attempt to emigrate was "in vain" because "no spot on earth... is half so sweet as that which gave us birth."⁶⁰ Such rhetoric echoed a belief among many African Americans that the United States afforded greater opportunities for black people than those possible in the proposed places of black emigration. Douglass' inclusion of the life cycle – "which gave us birth... shall be our last bed" – further illustrates his belief that black people born in the born in the United States should remain until their death. Instead of leaving the United States, Douglass called on his listeners to

Prove to the world that Genius dwells within
The immortal soul; - the color of the skin,
Whence this celestial essence gives its light,
What boots it, where it be black or white?⁶¹

In other words, African Americans needed not settle in places around the world to show African Americans' genius to others. Francis Johnson, Douglass would continue, had proven his capacity for genius to both black and white people in Philadelphia and beyond.

Douglass also aligned the history of African descended people by using – and amending – the rhetoric of Revolutionary Era leaders. His belief that African Americans should continue to reside in the United States coupled with his words that "For *this our* Fathers also fought and

⁵⁹ For more on Bishop Allen's advocacy of Haitian emigration as well as his developing black nationalism, see Richard Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008).

⁶⁰ "Address," *Pennsylvania Freeman* April 14, 1841, 4.

⁶¹ *Ibid.*

bled” evoked the rights promised in the nation’s founding documents and the bloodshed of the Revolutionary War to realize those promises. His connection between the bones of the “Fathers” and “our [African American]” bones signaled an affiliation, an inseparable bond between that history and the people seated before Douglass. While at once Douglass’ language invoked the language of the Founding figures, it possessed a double meaning; generations of African Americans had “fought and bled” for freedom, freedom from slavery and the same freedoms enjoyed by white Americans. In fact, Douglass equated the bones of the Fathers and African American bones. Ultimately, Douglass’ speech was one about belonging – of African Americans belonging in the national polity with equal rights. While Douglass’ use of the word “Fathers” hinted at those white men so often revered as the “Founding Fathers” who spoke of liberty, equality, and freedom, Douglass’ words also referenced the black men who fought in the American Revolution. Claims of African American citizenship based on black patriots’ service in the American Revolution had long circulated among African America communities.⁶²

Later in his speech, Douglass leveled a threat at oppression – and perhaps the oppressors themselves – that if they did not “change while [they] yet can,” that is, if racial oppression did not cease, it was only a matter of time before the coming of “the Hour and the Man.” Douglass’ reference to Harriet Martineau’s book “The Hour and the Man,” published but two months before Douglass gave his speech at the concert, may have incensed some of his listeners and spurred others to nod their heads in agreement. Martineau’s historical fiction detailed the Haitian Revolution and Toussaint L’Ouverture’s role in the transformation of Haiti at the turn of the

⁶² For more discussion of one of the most prominent black leaders in the Early Republic, Bishop Richard Allen, see Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*. For black citizenship claims arising from military service in the American Revolution, see Rita Roberts, “Patriotism and Political Criticism: The Evolution of Political Consciousness in the Mind of a Black Revolutionary Soldier,” *Eighteenth-Century Studies* 27, no.4 (Summer 1994): 587; Thomas J. Davis, “Emancipation Rhetoric, Natural Rights, and Revolutionary New England: A Note on Four Black Petitions in Massachusetts, 1773-1777,” *New England Quarterly* 62, no.2 (June 1989): 253; Charles W. Akers, “‘Our Modern Egyptians’: Phillis Wheatley and the Whig Campaign against Slavery in Revolutionary Boston,” *Journal of Negro History* 60, no.3 (July 1975): 397-410; Quarles, *The Negro in the American Revolution*, 39.

nineteenth century. Douglass assumed that those to whom he was speaking were members of a knowing audience. Many of his peers knew that he had spent a year and a half in Haiti. Others still knew of the book to which Douglass referred and understood the implicit threat that black revolutionaries could forcefully overthrow racially oppressive rulers. Douglass left his audience members to interpret that portion of his address as they saw fit.

Douglass' visual production and oratory repeatedly stressed that African Americans could enjoy success in the United States. Denouncing emigrationist rhetoric that circulated in Philadelphia and other cities, Douglass encouraged black youth to take pride in their national homeland in spite of the travails that awaited them due to the racial heritage. Douglass spoke from experience; he had traveled to Haiti and could make the comparison between the opportunities and livelihood available to African descended people in both places. The print of Francis Johnson based on Douglass' daguerreotype visibly attested to possibilities of African Americans. From Douglass' speech, it remained clear that his recent experience living and painting in Haiti left an indelible mark on his life. Douglass demonstrated this visually when he later juxtaposed the paintings he completed in Haiti with those he completed in England to make radically subversive assertions about black achievement and Haitian culture.

THE ANTI-SLAVERY CAUSE AND ARTISTIC TRAINING IN LONDON

Douglass utilized his abolitionist networks to plan a trip to London to benefit his career and further develop his racial politics. Within two weeks of arriving home in Philadelphia in 1839 after spending a year and a half in Haiti, Douglass applied for a passport to travel to

England.⁶³ The story of his passport application survives thanks to his sister, Sarah Mapps Douglass, and her friendship with Angelina Grimké Weld. In a letter written by Angelina Grimké Weld to the British abolitionist, Elizabeth Pease, Weld wrote that she felt

induced to write thee thus soon again that I may introduce to thee and thy dear friend of the brother of our friend and sister in Christ, Sarah M. Douglass of Philadelphia, with whose name and that of her precious other thou art acquainted, as bearing a prominent place in the facts I adduced to show the existence and extent of prejudice among Friends.⁶⁴

As a means of relating truth and encouraging sympathy, she continued: “this family has suffered deeply from this unhallowed and cruel feeling.” Getting to the central point of the letter, Weld wrote that

Robert Douglass’s object in visiting England is to obtain further instruction and the means of improvement in his profession as a portrait painter; he takes with him letters of recommendation from Thomas Sully who crossed the Atlantic to take the portrait of Queen Victoria. He will probably show you these letters and they will be better testimonials than any thing I can write.⁶⁵

Weld’s letter reveals several important bits of information about the transatlantic abolitionist network and the circumstances affecting Douglass’ artistic career.⁶⁶ The letter testifies to the extensive abolitionist network of which Sarah and her brother were a part. Weld also solicited Pease’s sympathy in referencing the prejudice that Sarah suffered at the hands of the Quakers perhaps for the intent of securing favor for Robert. Weld’s letter identified the purposes for which Douglass hoped to travel to London. The letter also established Douglass’ credibility as a portrait painter by referring to one of the preeminent painters in the United States

⁶³ “The Passport Question,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 28, 1849, 2. The article quotes a letter dated July 13, 1839 in which Richard Vaux requests a passport for Robert Douglass Jr. Douglass had arrived on a ship from Port au Prince on July 1, 1839.

⁶⁴ Gilbert H. Barnes and Dwight L. Dumond, eds., *Letters of Theodore Dwight Weld Angelina Grimke Weld and Sarah Grimke, 1822-1844* (Gloucester, MA: P. Smith, 1965), 792.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶⁶ Scholars have envisioned networks of abolitionists across the Atlantic Ocean to be influenced by contemporary European thinkers and politics. Correspondence among leaders reveals the shared and disparate strategies related to the business, religious connections, and local political maneuvering of antislavery efforts. See J.R. Oldfield, *Transatlantic Abolitionism in the Age of Revolution* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013); W. Caleb McDaniel, *The Problem of Democracy in the Age of Slavery: Garrisonian Abolitionists and Transatlantic Reform* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 2013).

at the time – Thomas Sully – and Sully’s painterly experience. Furthermore, to allay any possible doubts that Pease may have had about the veracity of Weld’s high praise for Douglass, and the impressive fact that Sully had written a recommendation, Weld wrote that Pease would probably see the documents of recommendation to confirm the authenticity of Douglass’ skill.

The closing of Weld’s letter attributed urgency to Douglass’ attempt to travel to and study in Europe. In the postscript, Weld added that as she was eating breakfast with Sarah Mapps Douglass that morning, Sarah “mentioned that her brother had been refused a passport to England on account of his color, the Secretary of State alleging that by the new Constitution of Pennsylvania the people of color were not citizens and therefore had no right to passports to foreign countries.”⁶⁷ The Secretary of State, John Forsyth, had personally rejected Douglass’ application. As it turned out, Richard Vaux, a prominent white member of the Pennsylvania State House of Representatives had written to Forsyth to request a passport on behalf of Douglass. Vaux praised Douglass to be the son “of highly respectable parents – [and] himself a man of worth and respectability – and a man of color.”⁶⁸ In his letter to Forsyth, Vaux also mentioned that Douglass intended to travel to “England, &c.... at the suggestion of some of the artists of this city, to improve himself in his profession which is portrait painting.”⁶⁹ Valediction aside, Forsyth responded in one sentence that “the [State] Department will not justify a compliance with your request.”⁷⁰ Racial prejudice coincided with Douglass’ artistic efforts again, but this time at the hands of the state government. Regardless of the state-sanctioned racial prejudice, Robert arrived in England by April 1840.

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ “The Passport Question,” *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 28, 1849, 2.

⁶⁹ Ibid.

⁷⁰ Ibid.

England proved to be fertile ground for Douglass' artistry and his abolitionist activity by providing him with access to artistic training unencumbered by racial prejudice. In April 1840, Robert mailed a letter to his family in Philadelphia relating the good news that, unlike being ejected from an art gallery in Philadelphia several years before his trip to England, he had not been denied entrance to the National Gallery or the British Museum. He relished the opportunity to study paintings by Raphael, Titian, Correggio, Claude, Carracci, da Vinci, Vandyke, Rubens, Reynolds, and Benjamin West unmolested. He found comfort in the fact that the British "do not consider it a miracle that I should wish for an acquaintance with the 'great masters,' but do all in their power to assist me, and condemn the ridiculous prejudices of my own countrymen." He detailed the diversity of people studying art alongside him in the galleries and wrote to his family that, when speaking to other artists studying there, he felt a "proud consciousness that I am received on terms of equality." Douglass acquired more formal training by attending lectures on painting and sculpture given by Royal Academy members.⁷¹ The *Pennsylvania Freeman*, the abolitionist newspaper that printed the letter that Douglass sent to his family, took pride in telling its readers that, while two other newspapers refused to print the letter, it "gladly give[s] it a place in our columns, and rejoices in the fresh testimony it furnishes us of superior talent, and ability, in a colored man."⁷² For those readers unfamiliar with Douglass and his work, the newspaper then reaffirmed Douglass' social capital as a man who "has made his way to a standing of high respectability in his profession, and in Society generally."⁷³ Such a feat was especially admirable

⁷¹ "The subjoined letter," *Philadelphia Freeman*, June 11, 1840, 2. The article notes that the letter was sent on April 29, 1840.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ *Ibid.*

given that “he has done [so] through a weight of prejudice, which would have kept under any mind of not much more than ordinary strength.”⁷⁴

The World’s Anti-Slavery Convention in June 1840 provided opportunities for Douglass both to improve his skills as a portrait painter and surround himself with prominent abolitionists. Held in London, the convention attracted over five hundred abolitionists from the Caribbean, North America, and Europe.⁷⁵ Among them were some of the most prominent and outspoken advocates of the abolition of slavery including Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Wendell Phillips, William Lloyd Garrison, Charles L. Remond, George Thompson, and Thomas Clarkson. Douglass met some of these individuals during his time in London. In her diary, Lucretia Mott mentioned that she ate breakfast with Douglass and George Thompson, the fiery British abolitionist, in London on June 9 and visited with Douglass on June 16. Though she did not detail her conversations with Douglass, one can be sure that Douglass heard conversations about black rights and perhaps women’s rights as well, given the turmoil over women’s participation at the convention.⁷⁶ Douglass joined Mott when she visited Benjamin Robert Hayden, a well-respected British painter of the era, to have her portrait painted for his now-famous painting of the convention. He accompanied Mott for her sitting and took instruction from Hayden.⁷⁷ That day, the politics of abolitionism and visual culture again coalesced in Douglass’ life.

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Ira V. Brown “Cradle of Feminism: The Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society, 1833-1840,” *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 102, no.2 (April 1978): 162; Kathryn Kish Sklar, “Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation” American and British Women Compared at the World Anti-Slavery Convention, London, 1840,” *Pacific Historical Review* 59, no.4 (November 1990), 453-499.

⁷⁶ Initially, the meeting organizers invited women to the convention, but later modified the invitations to invite “gentlemen” only. They barred women from being delegates in the convention and restricted their presence to the gallery where they watched the convention without debating or voting on the resolutions being discussed by the male delegates below. For more information, see Brown, “Cradle of Feminism,” 162 and Sklar, “Women Who Speak for an Entire Nation,” 453-499. See also Frederick B. Tolles, ed., *Slavery Question and “The Woman Question”*: *Lucretia Mott’s Diary of her Visit to Great Britain to Attend the World’s Anti-Slavery Convention on 1840* (Haverford, PA: Friends’ Historical Association, 1952), 26, 34.

⁷⁷ Frederick B. Tolles, ed., *Slavery and “The Woman Question”*; *Lucretia Mott’s Diary of Her Visit to Great Britain to Attend the World’s Antislavery Convention of 1840* (Haverford, PA: Friends’ Historical Association, 1952). Mott,

While in London, Douglass simultaneously enhanced his artistic skills and strengthened his abolitionist connections. Meeting with Lucretia Mott – a veteran of antislavery activity and women’s rights – was no unimportant matter. Mott had attended and spoken at the founding meeting of the American Anti-Slavery Society in 1833 and was one of the founding members of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society.⁷⁸ Douglass almost certainly met with Lucretia Mott in London because of her connection to his mother, Grace Douglass, and Robert’s sister, Sarah Mapps Douglass, both of whom served with Mott on the board of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society. All three women had attended the Anti-Slavery Convention of American Women in 1837. Mott’s meeting with Robert Douglass Jr. apparently made a favorable impression on Mott since, years later, she later introduced him via letter to Wendell Phillips. This introduction later paralleled a dramatic shift in Douglass’ career.

“HAYTIEN LADIES” AND THE BRITISH AND ITALIAN MASTERS

Published after his return to Philadelphia from London, the advertisements for Douglass’ exhibition of Haitian paintings revealed his strategies to attract members of the public to learn about Haiti. In March and April 1841, Douglass took out long advertisements in the *Pennsylvania Freeman*. In them, he promoted an exhibition and lecture on Haiti where he and his paintings that would take center stage. Beginning the advertisement for his “Haytian Collection,” Douglass itemized his many skills as a “Portrait and Miniature, Sign and Ornamental Painter and Gilder, Teacher of Drawing and Painting, the French Language,” and

Slavery and the Woman Question, 34 records his visit to Mott when she and others were at the London Anti-Slavery Convention. Robert Douglass Jr. went with her when she visited Benjamin R Hayden to have her portrait executed for the huge Convention painting. (See Benjamin Robert Hayden, *The Autobiography and Memories of Benjamin Robert Hayden*, 684); Mott, *Mott's Diary of Her Visit to Great Britain*, 49 notes that Robert Douglass Jr. accompanied her to Haydon’s [sic] for a sitting in the entry for June 29, 1840.

⁷⁸ Brown, “Cradle of Feminism,” 155.

even his prior instruction of “Spanish Guitar, etc.”⁷⁹ Creating a list of such varied artistic skills conveyed the idea that Douglass was an experienced painter and a multitalented man who had received the benefits of an extensive education. He “respectfully inform[ed] his friends and the Public, that having returned to his Native City after a residence of 18 months in the Republic of Haiti, he purpose[d] delivering a Lecture on that interesting country, and some of its most distinguished personages.”⁸⁰ He also included the important detail that “the lecture will be illustrated with accurate Portraits principally executed by R. D. Jr. while in the Republic.”⁸¹ Douglass highlighted the fact that he painted the portraits in Haiti to create the idea of a more “accurate” art that was created on-location and unmarred by any potential inaccuracies of memory that may have disinterested some viewers. Furthermore, Douglass’ mention of his long stay in Haiti communicated a knowledge of and familiarity with a place that greatly interested black and white Americans.⁸²

The paintings catalogued both the social history of the Haitian elite as well as the military and governmental history of the Caribbean country. As people entered St. Thomas Church to hear Douglass speak about Haiti, he treated them to a visual display rich with information about the Caribbean country. Facing them were eleven paintings on varied subjects: former Haitian President Alexander Petion, Haitian President Jean Pierre Boyer, Haitian General Joseph Balthazar Inginac, three portraits of “Haytien Ladies,” the funeral of former Haitian President Alexander Petion, Haitian Independence Day of 1839, “Haytien Fruit – Gazettes, Proclamation, &c.,” and a portrait of Douglass himself executed by his friend, the Haitian painter M. Colbert

⁷⁹ “Haitian Collection,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, March 31, 1841, 3 and April 7, 1841, 4.

⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁸² For the contested, but recurring interest in Haiti and African American emigration to Haiti, see Newman, *Freedom’s Prophet*; Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War*, 33-54; Leslie Alexander, “The Black Republic: The Influence of the Haitian Revolution on Black Political Consciousness, 1817-1861” in Maurice Jackson and Jacqueline Bacon, eds., *African Americans and the Haitian Revolution: Selected Essays and Historical Documents* (New York: Routledge, 2009).

Lochard.⁸³ For a twenty-five cent entrance fee, attendees could view a very large painting of the Haitian independence celebration about which Douglass had written to his family in 1839.⁸⁴ The advertisement describing the large painting of the independence celebration listed it as having “accurate views” of several governmental buildings and “more than 200 figures” taking part in the festivities.⁸⁵ While Douglass did not list the physical dimensions of the canvas, such a painting would have been considerably larger than most portraits, due to the number of people depicted. This description signaled Douglass’ proficiency in several modes of painting – portraits, still lifes, and history paintings to readers of his advertisement. Listing the subject matter as well as the variety of painting styles marked yet another strategy for Douglass to encourage interest in his exhibition.

One painting in the exhibition celebrated symbols of the Haitian governmental documents, journalism, and culture. The painting is no longer extant, though its title and short description, along with the other paintings in the exhibition, illuminate its subject matter and message. Titled “Sketches of Haytien Fruits,” readers of the advertisement may have been initially assumed that the title referred to agricultural products of the country such as coffee. The description following the title, which read “Gazettes, Proclamations, &c.,” clarified the meaning and content of the painting for the advertisement’s readers. That Douglass labeled the unnamed gazettes and proclamation to be fruits of the Haiti reveals his thinking of Haiti as a place of black achievement and empowerment. The fruit borne by black self-government and black intellectual production led to governmental documents, journalism, and culture. In other words, black leadership enabled the growth of culture and black cultural institutions. Douglass outlined this process of growth in a speech in St. Thomas during which he stressed the importance of black

⁸³ “Haitian Collection,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, March 31, 1841, 3 and April 7, 1841, 4.

⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵ *Ibid.*

cultural institutions. In front of fellow members of the Philadelphia Library Company, he praised “a soil where knowledge warms the ground/ [in which] the glowing fruits of Genius will be found.”⁸⁶ The ingredients of knowledge, access, and opportunity mixed carefully by black leaders resulted in the production of black cultural “fruits” that Douglass displayed in his painting “Sketches of Haytien Fruits.” For Douglass, the black leadership of Haiti was the soil from which grew and blossomed the gazettes and proclamations present in the painting displayed to the visitors at St. Thomas that March night in 1841.

A review of the joint lecture and exhibition attested to Douglass’ skill as a painter and educator. It recorded that it “afforded evident gratification” to those who attended the lecture on Haiti’s “discovery, history, condition, and the manners and character of its people.”⁸⁷ The review lauded Douglass “whose skill as an artist is highly creditable to his talents and perseverance under all the discouragements to which one of his complexion is exposed.”⁸⁸ The review pointed out that Douglass’ lecture “was agreeably illustrated with portraits of distinguished Haytiens, sketches of Haytien costumes, scenery, &c.” In that way, the image verified, or at the very least illustrated, the points that Douglass made that night. The images became a medium through which audience members experienced the sights and events of the Caribbean country. The review lamented that the audience “though respectable, was much smaller than we should have been glad to have seen present.”⁸⁹

Less than a month after his Haitian exhibition, Douglass unveiled to the public his painted copies of Lorrain, Lawrence, and Correggio paintings that he studied while in London. Students of academic art regularly copied famous paintings as an instructional method to “lead

⁸⁶ “Address,” *Pennsylvania Freeman* April 14, 1841, 4.

⁸⁷ “Lecture on Haiti,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, April 28, 1841, 3.

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

students through imitation to invention” while providing them with a visual cache of art from which to draw procedural and thematic inspiration.⁹⁰ The title of his advertisement – “Benjamin West, P.R.A., John Kemble, Esq.” – included names familiar to those aware of British culture. West was a famous painter from the United States painting and living in England while Kemble was a famous British actor known for his Shakespearean roles. Both had been deceased for more than twenty years when Douglass displayed their paintings at St. Thomas in 1841. Douglass described the paintings of Kemble and West as “accurate copies... from the originals” thereby lending an air of authenticity and verisimilitude to the paintings while crediting himself with the ability to reproduce truthfully Sir Thomas Lawrence’s masterful paintings.⁹¹ He charged adults 12 ½ cents for admission, thereby making it more accessible than his Haitian exhibition the previous month.⁹² In keeping with the spirit of supporting the education of youth as per his speech in March, Douglass encouraged the attendance of children by admitting them for half price.⁹³ Given his address about the importance of black education and cultivating knowledge from which resulted moral growth, it was no surprise that Douglass himself engaged in the act of educating members of the black community in Philadelphia – old and young – in the arts.

Douglass took the opportunity to display his paintings of black Haitian leaders alongside his British copies for the purpose of educating his viewers. Making the paintings accessible to a

⁹⁰ Paul Duro, “The Lure of Rome: The Academic Copy and the *Académie de France* in the Nineteenth Century,” in *Art and the Academy in the Nineteenth Century*, eds. Rafael Cardoso Denis and Colin Trodd (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2000), 134. For more on the process and goals of copying art for educational purposes in the nineteenth century, see Véronique Chagnon-Burke, “‘A Career True to Woman’s Nature’: Constructing the Woman Artist in France’s Midcentury Feminine Press,” in *Women Art Critics in Nineteenth-Century France: Vanishing Acts*, ed. Wendelin Guentner, (Newark, DE: University of Delaware, 2013), 127; Nancy Finlay, “Introduction: Taking a Fresh Look at Nineteenth-Century Lithography,” in *Picturing Victorian America: Prints by the Kellogg Brothers of Hartford, Connecticut, 1830-1880*, ed. Nancy Finlay (Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 2010), 1-10; Howard Singerman, *Art Subjects: Making Artists in the American University* (Berkeley; University of California Press, 1999); April F. Masten, *Art Work: Women Artists and Democracy in Mid-Nineteenth Century New York* (Philadelphia: University of Philadelphia Press, 2008), 242.

⁹¹ “Benjamin West, P.R.A. John Kemble, Esq.” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 5, 1841, 3.

⁹² *Ibid.* See also “Lecture on Haiti,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, April 28, 1841, 3.

⁹³ “Benjamin West, P.R.A. John Kemble, Esq.” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 5, 1841, 3.

viewing public was important since Douglass again displayed his paintings of Haitian Presidents Petion and Boyer as well as another dignitary, General Inginac, whom he had seen at the Haitian Independence celebration.⁹⁴ He described these individuals as “some of the great men of the Republic of Haiti” to attract attendees to his exhibition, not out of personal agreement with their support of African American emigration to Haiti.⁹⁵ Such images stood in stark contrast to the 1839 print “Johnny Q, Introducing the Haytien Ambassador to the Ladies of Lynn, Mass.,” by *Life in Philadelphia* creator Edward Williams Clay. He used broken English, animalistic facial features, and derogatory references to the Haitian ambassador’s lips and body odor to ridicule the black dignitary. As scholar Elise Lemire has argued, the print partly operates by maligning white female abolitionists who have allegedly joined the antislavery cause because of their sexual desire for black men.⁹⁶ Douglass’ mention that his paintings had been completed “whilst in that republic [of Haiti] in 1839” also lent credibility to the paintings since they had been done in person, and not from Douglass’ memory or imagination.⁹⁷

But what did it mean to display paintings of famous leaders of Haiti alongside those painted by the British and Italian masters? Douglass’ radical pairing of these subjects made bold statements about black civilization. By exhibiting these paintings side by side, Douglass subverted the idea of Haiti as uncultured, unrefined, and uncivilized. The medium of the oil painting – itself imbued with significations of culture, refinement, and wealth – further elevated the status of the Haitians depicted in Douglass’ paintings to the status afforded to the subjects of the Italian and British paintings that Douglass studied. Using visual culture, Douglass undermined the assumed racial and cultural hierarchy between black Haitians and white

⁹⁴ “Commemoration of Haytien Independence,” *Liberator*, February 9, 1838, 23.

⁹⁵ “Benjamin West, P.R.A. John Kemble, Esq.,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 5, 1841, 3.

⁹⁶ For more about this print, see Lemire, “*Miscegenation*,” 62–63, 73, 94–96.

⁹⁷ “Benjamin West, P.R.A. John Kemble, Esq.,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, May 5, 1841, 3.

Europeans. It is probable that oil paintings displaying black leaders, never mind Haitians, had never before been exhibited in the United States next to copies of British and Italian paintings and those of a famous white painter and actor.

IMAGES INFORMING PUBLIC SENTIMENT

By the 1830s and 1840s, the belief that images held persuasive power that could affect their viewers in positive and substantial ways was widespread.⁹⁸ *Parley's Magazine*, with a self-reported subscription base of twenty thousand customers, proposed that its pages would feature a plethora of images “selected not only with a view to adorn the work, but to improve the taste, cultivate the mind, and raise the affections of the young to appropriate and worthy objects.”⁹⁹ Of a series of panoramas depicting Thebes and Jerusalem, the *Pennsylvania Freeman* lauded the works and gave “our hearty amen” to a *Christian Observer* review of the paintings which it then reprinted. *Christian Observer* recommended “these beautiful pictures” for their readers “who are seeking for useful and intellectual recreation.”¹⁰⁰ “If such intellectual and moral exhibitions were appreciated,” the *Christian Observer* continued, “their influence on society, and especially on the young, would be felt extensively, and we might hope that to see the day when our citizens would have a disrelish for the demoralizing representations of the stage and other similar amusements.”¹⁰¹ Looking at images of the panoramas could be “intellectual recreation” meaning that individuals could engage with the image and glean from it teachings, messages, and ideas

⁹⁸ Brian Maidment, *Reading Political Prints, 1790-1870* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001); J.R. Oldfield, “Anti-Slavery Sentiment in Children’s Literature, 1750-1850,” *Slavery & Abolition* 10, no.1 (May 1989): 44-59; Cynthia S. Hamilton, “‘Am I Not a Man and a Brother?’ Phrenology and Anti-Slavery,” *Slavery & Abolition* 29, no.2 (June 2008): 173-187; David Turley, *The Culture of English Anti-Slavery, 1780-1860* (New York: Routledge, 2004), 47-50; Claire Midgley, *Feminism and Empire: Women Activists in Imperial Britain, 1790-1865* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 50. *Fourth Annual Report of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, with Some Account of the Annual Meeting, January 20, 1836* (Boston: Isaac Knapp, 1836), 20.

⁹⁹ “Children’s Department Parley’s Magazine,” *Emancipator*, February 18, 1834, 4.

¹⁰⁰ “Jerusalem and Thebes,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, April 14, 1841, 3.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*

that nurtured their intellect. The choice of the word “recreation” is interesting given the range of meanings, and consequently interpretations, understood by readers. Paired with “intellectual,” “recreation” meant “amusement,” but more probably “an educational exercise, lesson, or problem intended to be both instructive and enjoyable.”¹⁰² According to the article in the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, images could influence society and alter the habits of its members and convince them to stop partaking in “demoralizing” spectacles such as those on stage, which invariably included minstrel performances. Images held the power to not only entertain but also educate and teach their viewers. The firm hope that images could drastically alter the sensibilities of their viewers to individually and collectively reform society lay at the heart of the image’s potential. More explicitly religious or moralistic imagery such as a supplicant slave or the respectable portrait of a formerly person heightened such beliefs.

The opposite also held true; negative representations of black people could be destructive. The *Pennsylvania Freeman* chastised the editor of the *Cincinnati Herald* for having “puffed a nigger song book recently published in Cincinnati, and also for having advertised and puffed a concert of a similar character.”¹⁰³ The editor’s undue praise of the offensive material reflected poorly on his moral character. The editor of the *Cincinnati Herald* countered the critique by writing that a number of black high school students imitated Northern whites at a school function. The students’ “powers of mimicry,” he wrote, “are very strong, so that they can turn the tables whenever they choose upon white caricaturists.”¹⁰⁴ The *Pennsylvania Freeman* countered:

But is not Dr. [Gamaliel] Bailey aware of the very great difference in position which exists between the Yankees and the colored people? They can afford to be ridiculed and caricatured, whose wealth an influence and standing are respected all the world over; but it is quite another

¹⁰² "recreation, n.3a and 3d". OED Online. March 2014. Oxford University Press.
<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/159954?rskey=YzCQf6&result=1&isAdvanced=false>
(accessed June 11, 2012).

¹⁰³ “Caricatures,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, February 19, 1846, 2.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

thing when the subject of ridicule is an oppressed, despised, and suffering classes of people. Then the ridicule is cruel and none can indulge in it without violating the law of love.

In one of the towns of Canada, the civil authorities forbade the Ethiopian Minstrels to hold their concerts, assigning as a reason, that such exhibitions tended to degrade the colored population; and are abolitionists more slow to perceive this fact? Such exhibitions may be ‘sport’ to the audience of white people, but they are ‘death’ to a sensitive colored man. Let us imagine ourselves in their situation, think for a few moments with their thoughts, and feel with their hearts, and we shall shrink from inflicting such wounds upon them, as are sometimes inflicted, in a moment of thoughtlessness, even by their true friends.¹⁰⁵

The newspapers’ back-and-forth about the nature of material mocking black Americans demonstrated the contrasting beliefs about these materials as either innocuous entertainment or imminently detrimental to black people. The writer of the article pinpointed the disparities in power between the white and black imitators; the racial hierarchy established by white Americans placed black people – free and enslaved – on the lower rungs of the social order.

The writer of the article implored his readers to imagine themselves as their black, racially subjugated neighbors in order to foster empathy and alter future behavior. Just as Douglass closed the metaphorical distance between viewer and subject in his Haitian paintings, the editor guided white readers to “imagine ourselves in their [African Americans’] situation, think for a few moments with their thoughts, and feel with their hearts.” Doing so, he hoped, would prevent “inflicting such wounds” caused by the degrading nature of minstrel shows.¹⁰⁶ His narrative approach to make his white readers conscious of the power of popular cultural representations reveals an argument to locate simultaneously the site of racial intolerance, identify with its victims, and foment its destruction.

Beyond encouraging white readers to sympathize with those “oppressed, despised, and suffering” black members of society, some newspapers urged their white readers to *imagine* themselves as black people suffering racial injustices. In its advertisement soliciting young boys

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Ibid.

and girls to distribute anti-slavery tracts, circulars, notices, and other abolitionist print, the *Pennsylvania Freeman* insisted:

Your young minds are unclouded by avarice, prejudice, or pride; then give free scope to your generous sympathies for the poor, despised, down-trodden slaves – bring their sufferings home to yourselves; think what would be your feelings to see *your* father or *your* mother whipped until the blood ran down their backs; or *your* brother or *your* sister torn from you forever, and sold to some monster in the south or west, who felt no pity for them or for you.¹⁰⁷

Using second person pronouns, the advertisement directly addressed its young readers. The article also hailed its readers using the possessive “your” to make the proposed events – witnessing familial brutality and separation – address the reader directly and intimately. The linguistic strategy of using possessive and second person pronouns, coupled with the graphically violent scene outlined in the advertisement intended to elicit a strong personal reaction against such a scene that would then spur the reader to abolitionist thinking or action. The article, and the American Anti-Slavery Society children’s publication, *The Slave’s Friend*, operated under the logic that youth were especially impressionable and sensitive to the messages of abolition.

Douglass and his contemporaries knew the combined power of print and visual culture. In 1841, he created and printed lithographic images of several prominent black Philadelphian men that resulted in a lawsuit being brought against him. Though the documents pertaining to this case are scarce, they reveal the contested nature of visual culture representing African Americans in the 1840s. More importantly, they reveal the ways in which some African Americans understood the detrimental influence of derogatory images of African Americans and the lengths to which they attempted to limit their effects.

Though scarce, the documents pertaining to this case reveal the contested nature of cultural representations of African Americans in the early 1840s. On September 1, 1841, Robert Douglass Jr. appeared before Alderman Griscom in Philadelphia and was held on \$1,000 bail for

¹⁰⁷ “Anti-slavery work for Boys and Girls,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, June 16, 1841, 3. Emphasis in original.

libel. While the court docket does not specify the form in which the alleged libel occurred, newspapers reported that Douglass had committed libel by caricature.¹⁰⁸ As one newspaper reported,

It appears that Douglass prepared a caricature, representing the members and editors [of the Demosthenian Shield] aforesaid, in ludicrous figures and characters, which he had lithographed. He procured a large edition [to be] struck off, which he proposed to sell to the aggrieved party, or otherwise he would offer them for sale. They not agreeing to what they considered a gross imposition, he did expose them to sale, and hence the suit against him for libel.¹⁰⁹

Indeed, this is the first known instance of a derisive racial caricature depicting African American men created by a black visual artist. The print is no longer extant and the circumstances of its publication show that Douglass did not create it with the intention of advancing black rights. A contextual analysis of its production reveals the power of racialized images in the 1840s. The men depicted in Douglass' lithograph included Frederick Augustus Hinton, Thomas Crouch, Benjamin Stanley, and Joseph Willson. These men edited and contributed to the *Demosthenian Shield*, a black Philadelphian periodical published in conjunction with the Demosthenian Institute, an organization created by black men for the literary and general educational development of African Americans. Documents about the case reveal the ways in which some African Americans keenly understood the detrimental influence of derogatory images and the lengths to which they would go to limit their damaging effects.

The increasingly sharp words traded between Willson and Douglass in the weeks before the lawsuit hint at the reasons for the creation of the lithograph. The surviving record captures Douglass' responses only; the words published by Willson are unknown. It appears that published personal attacks on each other's character began the feud. Judging from an article

¹⁰⁸ Cour. 148 v. Robert Douglass Jr. 74 (1841). General Sessions Court Docket, September 1841 – January 1842, Philadelphia City Archives; “Local Affairs,” *North American* (PA), September 2, 1841, 2; “The Gatherer,” *Sun* (NY), September 9, 1841, 3; “City Gleanings,” *Public Ledger* (PA), September 2, 1841, 2.

¹⁰⁹ “Local Affairs,” *North American* (PA), September 2, 1841, 2.

Douglass published in August 1841, however, Willson’s writings about Douglass were very provocative. After Willson refused to print Douglass’ response to an article in the *Demosthenian Shield*, Douglass published an article in the *Public Ledger*. Douglass set a derisive tone for the remainder of the column by beginning the article with a sharp critique of Willson’s “ignorance.” Evidently, Douglass felt that the *Demosthenian Shield*, with Willson at its helm, printed malicious information about Douglass and perhaps his family.¹¹⁰ According to Douglass, Willson “impertinently” invited a conversation with Douglass and then, “refused to insert [Douglass’ response] in his columns [thereby] proving that if he possesses not a vestige of the eloquence of [the seventeenth century writer, Samuel Butler,] yet he inherits all *his courage*.”¹¹¹ This editorial power and its effective silencing of Douglass prompted Douglass’ accusation that “But from the *shadow* of the shelt’ring ‘Shield’ / Dealest out thy blows at those who love the light.” Sardonicly pointing out “the [*Demosthenian*] ‘Shield’ [is] as invulnerable as ‘Achilles,’” Douglass commenced a thirty-four-line stanza that hinted at the imagery he may have used to depict Willson in the libelous lithograph:

But for a caricature, oh hidden elf,
 Sketch for the world a likeness of thyself.
 Some say thou art a “Lion” but I know,
 Now thou has *spoken*, it is but in show,
 Oh’ *such* a one, of old disguised did pass
 He spoke, the world recognised [sic] but – an ass.
 Erect now, I beseech thy lengthy ears
 Patient take counsel, banish all thy fears.¹¹²

If the caricature for which Douglass later found himself in court resembled the poem Douglass printed in the *Public Ledger*, Willson would have been depicted as a cowardly donkey with long ears. Several lithographs of politicians depicted as doltish donkeys circulated in the decade

¹¹⁰ At least the first few issues of the *Demosthenian Shield* included “sketches” of prominent African Americans in Philadelphia. The second issue included a sketch of Robert Douglass’ Jr.’s father.

¹¹¹ Robert Douglass Jr., “The Demosthenian Shield,” *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), August 3, 1841, 3. Emphasis in original.

¹¹² *Ibid.* Emphasis in original.

before Douglass' lithograph.¹¹³ The animal evoked ideas of feckless leadership and foolish interests. Douglass employed both ideas throughout his published poem wherein he insulted Willson's intelligence, harshly judged Willson's writing ability, and mocked Willson's editorial competency.

Why did these black men decide to settle the dispute over Douglass' image with a lawsuit? Negative representations of individuals, regardless of race, could be severely detrimental to one's reputation, business, and/or livelihood when made public. Defamation of character, via newspaper, lithograph, or another medium, could quickly circulate among groups of people and damage the social status of the person being represented. As described earlier, the visual and material medium of a lithograph allowed for the quick circulation of this information. Hinton's lawsuit over a libelous caricature revealed that what was at stake was how the image would affect viewers. The main matter underlying the case rested on the assumption that the derogatory image would negatively influence viewers' perceptions of the depicted men. The preoccupation was both on the style and substance of the image, and more importantly, the feared *effect* of the image. Therefore, the case unveiled the implicit knowledge that images held the power to persuade, deceive, and convince viewers of deleterious ideas about these black men.

The men who were part of the lawsuit against Douglass recognized the importance of their image, and more specifically, the effect that their image would have on those who viewed and purchased it. In order for them to bring the suit against Douglass, the men must have first understood what a caricature was and its potential consequences. They needed to identify what constituted a caricature, and to do so, they learned by viewing other caricatures. As evidenced by

¹¹³ President Andrew Jackson was one politician depicted as or with a donkey in numerous prints during this era. See the following prints at the American Antiquarian Society: David Claypoole Johnson, *Great Locofoco Juggernaut* [Boston, ca. 1837]; James Akin, *The Man! The Jack Ass* [Philadelphia, ca. 1831-33]; *The Modern Balaam and His Ass* (New York, [ca. 1837]); *The Illustrious Footsteps* (New York, 1840); and Esop Jr., *Let Every One Take Care of Himself!* [New York, ca. 1833].

their lawsuit, they understood images, and caricatures in particular, to have potentially detrimental effects on the viewer's perception of the image's subject. Furthermore, the plaintiff and witnesses needed to be knowledgeable of the routes and definitions by which the courts worked. What does it mean that these men took legal action against a lithographer? First, it means that they knew that legal recourse could award them damages or prevent Douglass from circulating the print. Second, it showed that filing the charge might not have been the first measure they took to prevent the image's dissemination; after all, the business and personal relationships Douglass had with both Frederick Augustus Hinton and his daughter, Ada, suggest that Hinton and Douglass attempted to mediate the ire arising from the problematic image before the filing of the lawsuit. If so, the talks must have failed, and Douglass found himself in court before a jury. The jury of men found Robert Douglass Jr. not guilty of libel by caricature in 1841. Douglass, however, was ordered to pay the costs associated with the trial.¹¹⁴ Such a verdict must have greatly relieved Douglass, though being forced to pay the costs of the trial surely did not.

¹¹⁴ Cour. 148 v. Robert Douglass Jr. 74 (1841). General Sessions Court Docket, September 1841 – January 1842, Philadelphia City Archives. "Court of General Sessions," *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), October 28, 1841, 1.



Figure 2-4. Edward Williams Clay, “Philadelphia Fashions, 1837.”
Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Hinton had already been caricatured in a print by Edward Williams Clay that disparaged he and a female companion on racial grounds (see Figure 2-4). The print depicted these two figures looking directly at the viewer of the print. Dressed in expensive layers of clothing, wearing multiple forms of jewelry, and holding the fineries of elite society, the white begloved couple wears their wealth. The title, subject matter, and date of Clay’s print undoubtedly mark it

as being modeled after the runaway success of the “Life in Philadelphia” series etched eight years before by his own hand.

Clay employed highly stylized and complicated referents and signifying processes that helped viewers derive meaning from the image and its accompanying text. Clay rejected the grossly disproportional bodies that typified the figures of his “Life in Philadelphia” series. Instead, Clay communicated the race of the two figures in “Philadelphia Fashions, 1837” with stereotypical black dialect, skin color, and hair texture. Frederick Augustus Hinton’s spheres of coiffed hair resembled the hair of several of the black women depicted in the “Life in Philadelphia” series. The objects of leisure – parasol, cane, and oversized and ornate bonnet – appeared in several prints in this series as well. Such visual markers, coupled with the title “Philadelphia Fashions, 1837,” invoked Clay’s earlier “Life in Philadelphia” series. These details stand out even more due to the lack of a background and the positioning of the figures projected prominently into foreground.

The message of the print relied on the interplay between the images and text of the lithograph. The similarity of the print’s title – “Philadelphia Fashions, 1837” – referred knowing viewers to the title of Clay’s popular racial caricatures in his “Life in Philadelphia” series. Furthermore, the presentation of the figures and the clothes clashed with the class expectations that their stereotypical dialect and broken English implied. When asked what he was he was looking at, Frederick Augustus Hinton responds “I look at dat white loafer wot looks at me. I guess he is from New York.” The print makes the argument that the finely adorned clothes and accoutrements of the black man and woman belie their allegedly inferior racial background as marked by their verbal mistakes. In other words, their broken language communicates to viewers of the image that the Hinton’s incongruously belong to the class that their expensive and ornate

clothing and jewelry signify. Their refined clothing implies that they are cultured, but their imperfect language tells a different story.

The language of their spoken words revealed Clay's complicated racial humor and cultural proficiency. Clay's use of the word "wot" is one means by which he communicated the figures' lower social stature. While "wot" was not specifically stereotypical black dialect, newspaper articles that contained the word attributed the word to those of the lower classes who pronounced "what" as "wot." Another semantic signifier used in the print that was commonly ascribed to members of the lower classes was "loafer." A word introduced into common parlance only a few years before the publication of "Philadelphia Fashions, 1837," the word "loafer" connoted ideas of idleness, vagrancy, and general industrial worthlessness among those of the lower classes.¹¹⁵ One newspaper article noted, however, that "the propensity to loaf is confined to no rank in life: all conditions are, more or less, troubled with it."¹¹⁶ This conception of the loafer, coupled with the incorrect attribution of idleness, vagrancy, and industrial triviality to the black community of Philadelphia, placed the Hintons squarely within the accepted parameters of who could be a loafer, regardless of their fineries.

From this analysis of the language and visual markers in the print, the game of looking and seeing that drives the meaning of the print becomes clearer. The woman's question not only directs the conversation and viewer's gaze to Hinton, but also highlights the act of seeing undertaken by both figures. Using his monocle, Frederick looks out from the page at the imagined viewer of the print. Using text and the game of looking, Clay thus established a

¹¹⁵ "Loafer," *Daily Commercial Bulletin* (St. Louis, Missouri), December 16, 1836, 2.; "The Loafer," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, June 23, 1837, 2; "untitled," *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), September 9, 1836, 4; "untitled," *Sun* (Baltimore, Maryland), August 14, 1837, 2; "Loafer," *New Bedford Gazette* (MA), September 29, 1834, 1. "A Loafer," *Philadelphia Inquirer*, August 22, 1835, 2; "The First Loafer," *Columbian Register* (New Haven, CT), August 26, 1837, 4; "Loafer," *Haverhill Gazette* (Haverhill, MA), December 24, 1836, 2; "Loafer," *Saturday Morning Transcript* (Boston, MA), November 19, 1836, 47; "They Call Me A Loafer," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, LA), February 19, 1837, 2-3; "The Loafer," *Times-Picayune* (New Orleans, La), September 20, 1837, 2.

¹¹⁶ "Loafers," *New Hampshire Patriot*, July 6, 1835, 40.

triangular relationship between the print's viewer, Mrs. Hinton, and Mr. Hinton. His mention of New York may have referred to what some newspaper articles described as the birthplace of the term "loafer." It is also where Clay created and sold the lithograph. The joke is that white nineteenth century viewers understood the pictured Hintons as loafers due to her parasol and his cane, both of which hinted at the leisure of an outdoor stroll. The print's preoccupation with their unproductive activity of looking marked them as idle – as loafers.

Given the sharp criticism that Clay's caricature could circulate among a viewing public, it makes sense that Hinton took action to try to prevent Douglass' caricature from reaching the public. James Cook has described this era and those following as times when "the terrain of ideological and cultural struggle was becoming so ocularcentric."¹¹⁷ In other words, the struggle over shaping and controlling opinions played out in images. Hinton's use of the court system constituted his struggle over how he would be perceived by peers and strangers. Furthermore, Douglass' decision to produce visual material during an argument demonstrated that visual culture proved to be a powerful tool in shaping debates among black Philadelphians in the early 1840s.

DOUGLASS' EXPANDING BUSINESS

The time shortly after the libel suit was a challenging period in Douglass' professional life. In a letter of introduction that Lydia Maria Child wrote to Wendell Phillips, Child expressed the guidance and encouragement that she felt Douglass needed. "I wish you would advise with him, and speak a true, frank, and friendly word," she wrote. "He needs counsel."¹¹⁸ The tone and

¹¹⁷ James W. Cook, "Seeing the Visual in U.S. History," *Journal of American History* 95, no.2 (September 2008): 441.

¹¹⁸ Lydia Maria Child to Wendell Phillips, March 7, 1842. Wendell Phillips Collection. Houghton Library, Harvard University.

information of the letter implied that Douglass' business would benefit from a move away from Philadelphia. That seemed to be the "counsel" that Child wished Phillips to impart to Douglass, since apparently all Phillips knew of Douglass was the information written by Child in this introductory letter. Child took the time to mention that Douglass "belong[ed] to a very intelligent and respectable family" and detailed his training with the British artists, Benjamin Hayden and Charles Robert Leslie, during his time in London.¹¹⁹

A few months later, Douglass had started afresh in New York City and adopted a more diverse business model that focused on producing and teaching art. During the summer of 1842, Douglass advertised his "Gallery of Paintings" in New York City. Welcoming visitors at his 202 William Street gallery, Douglass admitted those eager to see his artwork without charging an entrance fee. The advertisement framed the purpose of the Gallery as largely a means to an end; Douglass exhibited his work not necessarily to sell it or earn new commissions, but to attract pupils whom he would teach. As such, the advertisement marked a public declaration of Douglass' instruction of art.¹²⁰ It was also the first time in his career that Douglass displayed his art in New York City. Away from his hometown of Philadelphia, and "having terminated his studies in the 'divine art,'" Douglass marshaled his diverse artistic talents, his social connections, his elite artistic training, and his mastery of several visual artistic skills to attract students. He sought to impress the readers of the advertisement with all of the people whose countenance he had recorded using pencils, brushes, and engraving tools. His list of noblemen and famous men – including President Boyer of Haiti, Prince Albert, the Duke of Sussex, the Lord Mayor of Dublin Daniel O'Connell, abolitionist Thomas Clarkson, Archdeacon Wilberforce, and François Guizot – highlighted his international travels and his implicitly masterful skills required to gain access to

¹¹⁹ Ibid.

¹²⁰ "R. Douglass, Jr. Portrait and Miniature Painter," *Liberator*, July 8, 1842, 107.

these prominent individuals.¹²¹ The absence of inhibitive entrance fees enabled greater numbers of people to visit his gallery than otherwise would have. By offering complimentary admission and creating a more expansive business model, Douglass encouraged more people to view his work.

Douglass diversified his artistic portfolio and benefited from an expanded customer base. He placed an advertisement in the *Public Ledger* that called on local firemen to retrieve the equipment that he had painted.¹²² Later that month, Douglass took out a recurring advertisement that touted his ability to offer his painted goods at lower prices than his competitors, though what was more notable was that Douglass advertised his drawing and oil and watercolor painting classes “according to the practice of the best foreign schools.”¹²³ Douglass’ work resulted in a commission to paint a fire engine for the Globe Engine Company. The company, described as “active and respectable,” took home their “repainted and much improved” fire engine in February 1843 after Douglass helped make it “one of the very handsomest and most serviceable engines in the city and county.” The unnamed writer of the piece specifically lauded Douglass’ paintings on the sides of engine as “highly creditable” thus making it “altogether worthy of the company, and a subject of their pride.”¹²⁴ Such reviews testified to Douglass’ painterly skill as well as his entrepreneurial spirit.

An advertisement for Douglass’ daguerreotypes that ran for nine months during 1844 hinted at additional business aspects of Douglass’ changing profession. He promoted his broad range of visual artistic skills that included his proficiency in portrait and miniature painting and his training at four art institutions in London. He also advertised his ability to produce

¹²¹ Ibid.

¹²² “To Firemen!,” *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), October 15, 1842, 2.

¹²³ “R. Douglass, Jr.,” *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), October 24, 1842, 3.

¹²⁴ “Local Affairs,” *Public Ledger* (Philadelphia, PA), February 13, 1843, 2.

daguerreotype miniatures for the first time. The “Arch Street Daguerrian Gallery, the advertisement continued, “is in the same building, where miniatures can always be obtained, executed in the best manner, and the process willingly [sic] explained to the curious by the proprietor.”¹²⁵ Douglass appealed both to his potential customers’ desire for images and their wish to understand the process by which Douglass crafted them.

Selling his visual work also became a family venture. Robert’s sister, Sarah Mapps Douglass, displayed her own goods for sale in the Arch Street Daguerrian Gallery. Visitors to the space saw her “marking[s] on linen, silk, &c” and could purchase them for an undisclosed sum.¹²⁶ Advertising and offering three distinct products in one space expanded the possibilities for the financial success of both Robert and Sarah. Passersby entering the storefront to view Sarah’s merchandise saw the daguerreotypes mounted around the store to display Robert’s skill and entice viewers to have their portrait painted or daguerreotype taken. Likewise, people attracted by the daguerreotypes in the street may have purchased one of Sarah’s silk and linen products. Their family business venture spoke to the methods that Robert and Sarah adopted to make a living.

Additionally, Douglass attempted to gain customers by advertising his various visual capabilities. He advertised a range of goods and skills: signs, banners, transparencies, and Masonic emblems.¹²⁷ Douglass’ advertisement also revealed his return to advertising the artistic profession that he first advertised in the early 1830s – sign painting. Fancying to label his workplace as “The Central Sign Painting Establishment,” Douglass noted that his willingness to describe the process of daguerreotypy in his Gallery to the curious visitor.¹²⁸ Mentioned that he

¹²⁵ “R. Douglass, Jr.” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, March 14, 1844, 2.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ “R. Douglass, Jr.,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, March 14, 1844, 4 and advertised through December of that year.

had studied drawing in the British Museum, at Saville House, Leicester Square, and studied painting in the National Gallery in London.¹²⁹ The ad ran through August of 1844. Douglass also wrote that “having acquired the above mentioned arts by great labor and expense, and having had to struggle against peculiar difficulties, flatters himself that a liberal public will not refuse him encouragement.”¹³⁰ By alluding to racial prejudice that he had experienced, Douglass appealed to his reader’s sympathy in the hope that it would fuel his visual production.

Douglass advertised more visual and non-visual artwork that drew still more attention to his skillset. In his “Gallery of Paintings,” Douglass also sold his translation of F. Lammennais’ *Book of the People*. He included the note that the “translation had been approved of by writers of established reputation, and other capable judges.”¹³¹ Mentioning his translation along with “his “[s]pecimens of Lithography, humorous and otherwise,” Douglass further attempted to attract customers to his Gallery. After all, as he noted the lithographs “designed, drawn on the stone, and splendidly colored by R.D., Jr., may at all times be seen in the Gallery.”¹³² This may have appealed to customers who preferred the accountability of an artist who wholly controlled each aspect of his lithographic production – research and design, execution, postproduction detail, advertisement, and sale. In doing so, he broadened the appeal of his advertisement to include those individuals interested in viewing or purchasing humorous lithographic prints, a very common visual genre in the 1840s. Increasing the number of potential customers by diversifying his work was a shrewd business strategy. Douglass tapped into the interests of several different customer bases.

¹²⁹ “R. Douglass, Jr.” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, March 14, 1844, 2.

¹³⁰ Ibid.

¹³¹ “R. Douglass, Jr. Portrait and Miniature Painter,” *Liberator*, July 8, 1842, 107. This was not Douglass’ first translation; two years earlier, he had translated from French the obituary and funeral eulogy of Jonathan Granville. Translated by Robert Douglass Jr., from the “Feuille du Commerce” of Port au Prince, the obituary and eulogy were printed in “Death of Citizen Jonathan,” *Colored American*, July 27, 1839, 1 after being reprinted from *Poulson’s American Daily Advertiser*.

¹³² “R. Douglass, Jr. Portrait and Miniature Painter,” *Liberator*, July 8, 1842, 107.

RESUMING HIS PRODUCTION OF ANTISLAVERY VISUAL CULTURE



Figure 2-5. Lithograph of Abby Kelley Foster after a daguerreotype by Robert Douglass Jr. 1846.
Courtesy of the American Antiquarian Society.

In the midst of expanding his business of visual production, Douglass created images of the famed abolitionist Abby Kelley Foster to advance the antislavery cause. In 1846, she visited Douglass' Daguerrian Gallery to sit for a daguerreotype (see Figure 2-5). In a letter he wrote to her, he enclosed one of the many daguerreotypes he had captured during her visit to his studio. Douglass explicitly wrote the reason for which he had taken her daguerreotypes: “for the purpose of being lithographed.”¹³³ There was one main reason to transform a daguerreotype into a

¹³³ Robert Douglass Jr. to Abby Kelley Foster, May 12, 1846. Abby Kelley Foster Collection. American Antiquarian Society.

lithograph – circulation. Daguerreotypes could not be cheaply, quickly, safely, or efficiently copied. Made with glass and/or metal, each was unique. The fragility made daguerreotypes impractical to be passed from person to person. Lithographs, however, allowed for the mass production of relatively cheaper images that resulted in larger numbers of viewers. Viewership was a key component in the Douglass’ production of Foster’s image. He wrote that

if in regarding your portrait a single spirit is encouraged to enter upon the same glorious, although arduous labors, or excited to action for the advancement of the great and Holy cause in which you are so indefatigably engaged I shall be amply rewarded.¹³⁴

What had almost certainly been one of his reasons for reproducing images of Garrison and other abolitionists became directly communicated in Douglass’ letter to Foster. Persuading the viewers of his portraits to empathize with the cause of abolitionism was one of Douglass’ important motivations for his work.¹³⁵

Even more specifically, Douglass hoped that his work spurred those who viewed the image, black and white, to enable those freedoms. In his letter to Foster, Douglass made clear his hope that viewers of his abolitionist images become “excited to action” in the cause of enslaved people’s rights. It is this intended effect after viewing the image that spurred Douglass to sell these lithographs of Foster from his Daguerrian Gallery in June of 1846.¹³⁶ Praise of the lithograph in the *Pennsylvania Freeman* further increased the visibility of the image. Described as a “handsome lithograph,” the “handsome picture [is] a likeness that will be recognised [sic] as far as it can be seen, by any one who has ever seen the original.”¹³⁷ It is unclear if “the original [likeness]” referred to the daguerreotype created by Douglass or Foster’s countenance itself. Due

¹³⁴ Ibid.

¹³⁵ Douglass also created several images of the well-known abolitionist Cassius Clay. Described as “very fine” in an editorial published in the *Pennsylvania Freeman*, these images are no longer extant. The review also promoted Douglass and his images for “does them handsomely, and at remarkably low prices.” See “Daguerreotype Likenesses,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, January 26, 1846, 2.

¹³⁶ “Portrait of Abby Kelley Foster,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, June 25, 1846, 3.

¹³⁷ Ibid.

to the daguerreotype acting as the mediator of Foster's appearance to the viewers of the lithographic image, the note encouraged readers to envision the verisimilitude of Douglass' image.

The review of Foster's image hinted at both knowing and unknowing audiences in much the same way that Douglass himself did while giving lectures at St. Thomas Church. The editor of the *Pennsylvania Freeman* praising the lithograph imagined a knowing viewer – that is, someone who had seen the “original [likeness]” – to agree that the lithograph bore a truthful resemblance to Foster. This assumed, of course, that the viewer of the lithograph had seen Foster in person, without technological mediation. This would have been possible given Foster's appearance and lectures in Philadelphia as part of her speaking tour in 1846. The note also educated the unknowing viewer – that is, someone not having seen Foster's “original [likeness]” – about Foster's appearance. Her printed name and accompanying signature beneath the portrait acted to verify her identity. Further emphasizing a purchaser's contribution to the antislavery cause, readers of the review could purchase the lithograph depicting Foster at both Douglass' studio and at the Anti-Slavery Office.¹³⁸ Douglass' order to strike off lithographs modeled from his daguerreotype underscored his use of technological innovation and visual production to advance the cause of abolitionism.

Douglass continued his dedication to the abolitionist movement by supporting the Annual Fair of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society in 1846. Held from December 17-19, the 11th Annual Fair raised money for the cause of abolition through the sale of abolitionist literature for “children and adults, daguerreotype likenesses of British abolitionists Thomas Clarkson and [William] Wilberforce, and a vast variety of goods suitable for the Christmas gift-giving

¹³⁸ Ibid.

season.”¹³⁹ The Committee of Arrangements, composed of such leading African American women including Amy Matilda Cassey, Margaretta Forten, Harriet Purvis, Sarah Purvis, and many other black and white women, envisioned the Annual Fair to directly benefit enslaved people. In a description of the upcoming fair, they requested that

[the enslaved people’s] more highly favored brethren and sisters should consent to receive the usual gratifications and luxuries of the season through a channel which will also convey blessings to the *poorest of the poor – the crushed and smitten slave*.¹⁴⁰

After the fair ended, an article in the *Pennsylvania Freeman* gushed about the fair’s success, which it reported as significantly aiding the abolitionist movement. The fair grossed the incredible sum of \$1,432.68 and, perhaps more importantly, “[n]ever before had the interest in the Fair been so general, or active participation in it so extensive among the abolitionists of eastern Pennsylvania.”¹⁴¹ As people from all over eastern Pennsylvania and several other states streamed in during the three days, Douglass’ artwork greeted them.

Douglass’ participation in the abolitionist fair underscored his dedication to the cause of emancipation. In giving a highly favorable description of the interior space wherein the Annual Fair took place, the reviewer detailed Douglass’ picture hung for all to see:

On entering the Saloon the eye first rested on a large and beautiful picture of a Liberty Bell painted by Robert Douglass, an artist of this city, and generously presented to the Fair. Its station was at the head of the room, over the orchestra. It bore the inscription, PROCLAIM LIBERTY THROUGHOUT THE LAND. Underneath this picture, and in front of the orchestra, were inscribed in large characters the following sentences, “DUTY IS OURS; CONSEQUENCES ARE GOD’S. ARE WE NOT VERILY GUILTY CONCERNING OUR BROTHER?”¹⁴²

Douglass’ picture and accompanying text expressed the message of deliverance from slavery about which the Committee of Arrangements had written in its advertisement for the Fair. Hung

¹³⁹ “Fair in the Assembly Building,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, December 10, 1846, 3.

¹⁴⁰ Ibid. Italics in original.

¹⁴¹ “Report of the Treasurer of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society” in *Fourteenth Annual Report of the Philadelphia Female Anti-Slavery Society* (Philadelphia: Merrihew and Thompson, 1848), 12 & “The Fair,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, December 24, 1846, 2.

¹⁴² “The Fair,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, December 24, 1846, 2. See also “It is highly gratifying to receive...” *Liberator*, January 29, 1847 & “The Fair,” *Pennsylvania Freeman*, December 24, 1846, 2.

at the head of the large room – the most visible and prominent position in the space – the painting attracted visitors’ attention and invoked messages of religiosity, national pride, and abolition. After all, “proclaim liberty throughout the land” referred to the inscription on the increasing iconic and infrequently rung Liberty Bell residing only blocks away. The quotation derived from the book of Leviticus, chapter 25, verse 10: “Proclaim liberty throughout all the land, to all the inhabitants thereof.” The image of the Liberty Bell had been used by various abolitionist societies for nearly a decade before Douglass’ appeared at the Fair. That Douglass “generously presented” the image to the Society bears noting, since it implied that Douglass donated the picture to the fair and therefore did not monetarily benefit from it. His donation of the visual centerpiece of the event underscored his dedication to the cause of antislavery, and more importantly, his involvement in disseminating its message to the public.

CONCLUSION

The decade of the 1840s ended on a more somber note for Douglass than it did for Reason. Douglass experienced several difficulties during the decade such as by the libel suit, moving his business to New York City, and then, sometime between the end of 1846 and February 1847 traveling to Kingston, Jamaica due to the inability “to gain a livelihood by his profession” in Philadelphia.¹⁴³ Douglass’ peripatetic time in Jamaica was fraught with unmatched expectations and displeasing realities related to its people, city life, and the high cost of business there.¹⁴⁴ After more than a year in Jamaica, he returned to the United States.

The lives and visual production of Robert Douglass Jr. and Patrick Henry Reason during the 1840s tell us a great deal about the struggle for black rights during that decade. The

¹⁴³ “Letter from Robert Douglass,” *The North Star*, June 2, 1848, 1.

¹⁴⁴ “Letter from Jamaica,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, April 20, 1848, 187.

countercultural images created by both men acted as a cultural battleground on which black actors challenged stereotypes of blackness and produced competing counternarratives in the service of black political enfranchisement and freedom from slavery. Their activities during the 1840s reveal the vast reach and importance of abolitionist networks, the organizational structures utilized by black rights' supporters, and the reasons for which they created imagery in support of free, enslaved, and formerly enslaved African Americans.

By studying the ways in which viewers interpreted the content and context of visual materials during this decade, the meanings of these images come into focus. The desired intentions and philosophical reflections of the artists themselves spotlight visual culture as a contested and influential terrain during the 1840s. The viewers of their images, they testified, had much to gain by reflecting on the ideas of black respectability, success, and intelligence in the service of black rights. This chapter has shown that the fight for black rights not only took place at marches, political conventions, and benevolent societies; the fight included print and visual culture created and disseminated by Robert Douglass Jr. and Patrick Henry Reason. Studying their participation in elocution societies, literary circles, and political conventions provides a frame for situating their artwork in a particular historical context and revealing what ideas, discourses, and events influenced their artwork. Both Douglass and Reason marshaled technological advances and developed their artistic skills to communicate countercultural messages about who African Americans were and what they could be in the United States. This chapter expands further the scope of abolitionist activity by considering the production of abolitionist images to be intertwined with, and essential to, the abolitionist movement and debates about the future of African Americans during the 1840s.

Chapter 3

Spectacle and Activism: Panoramas Exhibited by Three Black Abolitionists, 1850-1859

On the night of March 16, 1852, more than one hundred men, women, and children crowded into an exhibition hall in Wolverhampton, England. After they paid the entrance fee and took their seats, an assistant drew back a curtain to reveal a massive plane of canvas stretched taut between two moving cylindrical rods. Lamps illuminated the moving panorama from behind, while in front, audience members saw a sheet of canvas which stood between eight and twelve feet tall and extended for over a thousand feet. Over the course of the night, their host used the forty-six separate painted views depicted on the canvas to describe the horrors of the Middle Passage, regale the audience with views of cities in the United States, and recount his own life as a formerly enslaved man in Virginia. Both the range and the subjects covered that night – from “Gorgeous Scenery of the West India Islands” to enslaved people “Burning Alive” – amazed and horrified many of the attendees. They may have taken some solace knowing that some of the proceeds of their admission fee were to be used to purchase freedom for the enslaved wife and children of the host, Henry Box Brown.¹

Henry Box Brown was not the only African American who turned to the medium of the panorama as an anti-slavery device during the 1850s. William Wells Brown and James Presley (J.P.) Ball both fashioned moving panoramas of their own to help realize the goal of ending

¹ “Assize Intelligence,” *Daily News* (London, England), July 31, 1852, 3.

slavery in the United States.² William Wells Brown, a formerly enslaved man, decided to create a moving panorama that communicated anti-slavery themes after he found the representations of slavery in a popular moving panorama to be “very mild” and severely lacking.³ As such, he donated the entrance fees charged at the exhibitions of his panorama and directed attendees’ donations to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, its annual Anti-Slavery Bazaar, and the American Anti-Slavery Society.⁴ Henry Box Brown wrote that he exhibited his panorama in order to raise funds to purchase the freedom of his enslaved wife and children.⁵ J. P. Ball toured his panorama for the purpose of raising awareness of the brutalities of slavery and its progressively destructive effect on the American character. Never before studied in tandem, these three panoramas reveal multiple cultural strategies of abolitionist activists who attempted to realize emancipation in the United States. Cumulatively, these three black men displayed their representations of slavery to thousands of audience members in New England, the West, and the British Isles. The vast diversity of their audience members – black, white, men, women, children, young, old, slaveowner, and abolitionist – testified to the wide appeal of the moving panoramic medium, brilliant advertising strategies, and the precarious effects of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850.

This chapter examines the three panoramas exhibited by Brown, Brown, and Ball to discover how each used the medium of the moving panorama to make central the experience of

² A fourth African American man, Anthony Burns, created and toured a moving panorama of slavery in the late 1850s. Best known for his flight from slavery, his recapture in Boston, and his subsequent purchase from slavery by antislavery activists, Brown (and the historical record) left only trace bits of information regarding his panorama.

³ William Wells Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown’s Original Panoramic Views of the Scenes in the Life of an American Slave* (London: Charles Gilpin, 1849), 2.

⁴ *Nineteenth Annual Report, Presented to the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, By Its Board of Managers, January 22, 1851. With an Appendix* (Boston: Prentiss & Sawyer, 1851), 67.

⁵ The practice of purchasing the freedom of fugitive slaves was controversial among black and white antislavery activists because it bought into and further enabled the institution of slavery. For more about the campaign to purchase Frederick Douglass’ freedom and William Wells Brown’s rejection of just campaigns for his own freedom, see: Margaret M.R. Kellow, “Conflicting Imperatives: Black and White American Abolitionists Debate Slave Redemption,” in *Buying Freedom: The Ethics and Economics of Slave Redemption*, eds. Kwame Anthony Appiah and Martin Bunzl (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2007): 200-212.

enslaved people. Exhibiting views that shifted the primarily panoramic narrative from landscapes to the experience of African-descended people, these black men subverted the genre of the panorama to varying degrees. In doing so, their “oppositional and autonomous political expression”⁶ offered their audience members ideologies of race that contradicted contemporary popular cultural conceptions. Their representations of black people ran counter to established ways of conceptualizing blackness for the purpose of ending slavery in the United States. In refashioning the medium to center the experiences of those of African descent and by imbuing the artistic medium of the panorama with activist intentions, Brown, Box Brown, and Ball engaged the strengths of the panoramic medium by entertaining, educating, and encouraging viewers to experience vicariously the scenes before them. The chapter highlights their roles as black cultural producers who charged themselves with advancing alternative cultural representations of slavery and African Americans. By offering audiences understandings of race that fundamentally differed from prevailing racial ideologies, they expanded and refined discourses of race in the United States and the British Isles.

VISUAL SPECTACLE, CULTURAL EDUCATION

The panorama as a medium of entertainment and education had existed since the late eighteenth century in England. Initially stationary – with viewers gazing at an interrupted image that extended for great lengths – the panorama became popular with audiences in European countries and the United States as a means to view faraway lands, military battles, and other historical scenes. After its popularity diminished in the United States during the first quarter of

⁶ Daphne Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent: Spectacular Performance of Race and Freedom, 1850-1910* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 83.

the nineteenth century, the moving panorama enjoyed a “vigorous revival” in the late 1840s.⁷ These panoramas often depicted European locales but the most popular moving panoramas sated and generated an increasing interest in the frontier by picturing scenes of the American West, especially along river voyages.⁸ Indeed, the growth of moving panoramas’ popularity mirrored the expanding boundaries of the United States in the late 1840s and early 1850s. Americans read about the Mexican-American War, the annexing of Texas, the securing of part of California, and the vast tracts of lands infrequently visited by those on the East Coast of the United States.

Several men capitalized on the fascination of the West and its most visible, easternmost demarcation – the Mississippi River – by using the medium of the moving panorama. John Banvard was perhaps the most successful exhibitor of a moving panorama in the 1840s. He transformed the sketches he made during his multiple raft trips down the Mississippi River into two traveling panoramas of the Mississippi River that attracted more than a quarter million viewers in Boston alone.⁹ Railroad companies created new schedules to accommodate the passengers flocking to see his work. He toured his spectacular commercial success in Boston for six months and in London, England for twenty months where more than six hundred thousand Londoners turned out for the show and Queen Victoria requested a private viewing.¹⁰ Banvard was far from alone in his exploits. In the United States, many thousands attended the moving panoramas exhibited by John Rowson Smith, Samuel Stockwell, Leon Pomarède, John Skirving,

⁷ Angela Miller, “The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular,” *Wide Angle* 18, no.2 (April 1996), 38.

⁸ Stephan Oettermann, *The Panorama: History of a Mass Medium*, trans. Deborah Lucas Schneider (New York: Zone Books), 323. For scholarship on these moving panoramas, see: Joseph Earl Arrington, “Henry Lewis’ Moving Panorama of the Mississippi River,” *Louisiana History* 6, no.3 (Summer 1965): 239-272; Bertha L. Heilbron, “Documentary Panorama,” *Minnesota History* 30, no.1 (March 1949): 14-23; Joseph Earl Arrington, “Godfrey N. Frankenstein’s Moving Panorama of Niagara Falls,” *New York History* 49, no.2 (April 1968): 169-199; John Brewer, “Sensibility and the Urban Panorama,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70, no.2 (June 2007): 229-249; Joseph Earl Arrington, “The Story of Stockwell’s Panorama,” *Minnesota History* 33, no.7 (Autumn 1953): 284-290.

⁹ John Hanners, “A Tale of Two Artists: Anna Mary Howitt’s Portrait of John Banvard,” in *Minnesota History* 50, no.5 (Spring 1987): 205.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

and Henry Louis that depicted the Mississippi River and the expanding U.S. West.¹¹ Spectators eagerly attended panoramas of the Mexican-American War, Mexico, and by December 1852, John Wesley Jones' *Pantoscope of California, Nebraska, Utah, and the Mormons*. Jones' panorama "marked just how much the national imagination of the far West had expanded since the mid-1840s," as Martha Sandweiss has written, "when the Mississippi River seemed the boundary between the settled East and an only vaguely understood West."¹² Scholarship on moving panoramas in the United States has shown that, after of the medium's revival in the late 1840s, some panoramas threaded theories of Manifest Destiny throughout an exhibition of visual entertainment and spectacle.¹³

Moving panoramas celebrated an untouched, topographical beauty that promised vast, untapped economic wealth.¹⁴ Furthermore, with its diversity of subjects and locales, the moving panorama acted as a travelogue that proffered "liberating access to an apparently encyclopedic reality."¹⁵ Observers attended exhibitions of moving panoramas to learn about faraway lands to which they would never travel in person. In other words, panoramas presented the opportunity

¹¹ For more on these artists and their exhibitions, see: Joseph Earl Arrington, "Skirving's Moving Panorama: Colonel Fremont's Western Expeditions Pictorialized," *Oregon Historical Quarterly* 65, no.2 (June 1964): 133-172; Dorothy Dondore, "Banvard's Panorama and the Flowering of New England," *The New England Quarterly* 2, no.4 (December 1938): 817-826; Bertha L. Heilbron, "Making a Motion Picture in 1848: Henry Louis on the Upper Mississippi," *Minnesota History* 17, no.2 (June 1936): 131-158; Arrington, "The Story of Stockwell's Panorama," 284-290.

¹² Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend: Photography and the American West* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002), 50.

¹³ John Bell, "The Sioux War Panorama and American Mythic History," *Theatre Journal* 48, no.3 (October 1996): 279-299; Anne Baker, "Word, Image, and National Geography: Panorama Pamphlets and Manifest Destiny," in *American Literary Geographies: Spatial Practice and Cultural Production, 1500-1900*, eds. Martin Bruckner and Hsuan Hsu (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2004); Shelly Jarenski, "'Delighted and Instructed': African American Challenges to Panoramic Aesthetics in J.P. Ball, Kara Walker, and Frederick Douglass," *American Quarterly* 65, no.1 (March 2013): 119-155; Brooke, *Bodies in Dissent*, 81-82; Michael A. Chaney, *Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2008), 220, footnote 34; Oettermann, *The Panorama*, 323-342.

¹⁴ Martin A. Berger has argued that racial ideologies shapes the reception of visual material, even images devoid of people, during the nineteenth century. Racialized perspectives brought to bear on visual artifacts, among them landscape paintings, communicated viewers' understandings of colonizing and imperialist modes of thinking. See Martin A. Berger, *Sight Unseen: Whiteness and American Visual Culture* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2005).

¹⁵ Angela Miller, "The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular," 43.

for audience members to “experience the foreign and exotic” on a grand scale with the assistance of a narrator who acted as a knowledgeable tour guide but without the costs and “inconveniences of actual travel.”¹⁶ Underscoring the subject of slavery within a medium that primarily valued topography, Henry Box Brown, William Wells Brown, and J.P. Ball forcefully articulated the increasingly oppressive force of slavery in the United States for the purpose of engendering its downfall. Instead of presenting Western lands that could be viewed to hold untapped economic wealth, their panoramas stridently portrayed the economic wealth generated – and withheld from – enslaved African Americans. Their exhibitions offered encyclopedic knowledge of the peculiar institution without the suffering experienced by the people painted on the canvas.

Scholars have shown that claims of veracity and authenticity partly propelled the popularity of moving panoramas.¹⁷ Advertisers and those who narrated moving panoramas stressed that the images and their subjects accurately represented what viewers would see and experience if they journeyed to the depicted locations. Attendees often described views, “each one a correct likeness of the original,” with language enveloped with the language of veracity and authenticity that panorama promoters publicized.¹⁸ Citing the artist’s personal experience rafting down the Mississippi River, traveling to California, or navigating the area surrounding Niagara Falls, bolstered the authority of their claims of authenticity and veracity. These occasionally gymnastic strategies of persuasion were not the sole realm of panorama promoters; scholars have argued that scores of nineteenth century writers and artists rooted their assertions

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ John Brewer, “Sensibility and the Urban Panorama,” *Huntington Library Quarterly* 70, no.2 (June 2007): 229-249; Joseph Earl Arrington, “Henry Lewis’ Moving Panorama of the Mississippi River,” 239-272; Joseph Earl Arrington, “Skirving’s Moving Panorama,” 133-172.

¹⁸ *Reville* (St. Louis, MO), October 29, 1848 as quoted in Joseph Earl Arrington, “The Story of Stockwell’s Panorama,” 286.

of veracity and authenticity in personal experience.¹⁹ Advertisers and narrators of panoramas capitalized on the desire to be entertained by a medium that alleged to reproduce a visual, mirrored reality. As such, many observers trusted that paying an admission fee and viewing the panoramic scenes resulted in a simulated, vicarious experience.

Several characteristics of moving panoramas aided in the dissemination of their messages by encouraging a captivating experience for the viewer. The size of a panorama enabled viewers to witness scenes on a grand scale and a large surface area could be filled with more detail than images of a smaller scale. Furthermore, its size enabled creators to shift times of day, locations, and complete storylines with the turn of a lever. That only select scenes could be displayed at once, instead of the one enormous panoramic view characterizing immobile panoramas, created suspense and anticipation for the next view yet to be unrolled by the panorama assistant.²⁰ Moving panoramas also benefitted their exhibitors and audiences with their portability. Exhibitors disassembled moving panoramas and transported them to another location where they could display its views to more patrons willing to pay to see it. As a result, moving panoramas circulated not only their views painted on canvas, but also the ideologies embodied in those views and given voice by the panorama narrator. The cost to attend panoramas rendered them accessible to millions of people and ubiquitous discounts for youth increased the number of children in attendance. These elements also contributed to the “vigorous revival” of the panorama in the United States during the late 1840s.²¹

The prominence of these three black men coincided with the more public leadership roles inhabited by African American antislavery advocates in the 1840s and early 1850s. Escaped

¹⁹ Ann Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth: Personal Narratives in Nineteenth-Century America* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001); Martha A. Sandweiss, *Print the Legend*; Angela Miller, “The Mechanisms of the Market and the Invention of Western Regionalism: The Example of George Caleb Bingham,” *Oxford Art Journal* 15, no.1 (1992): 3-20.

²⁰ Angela Miller, “The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular,” 49.

²¹ *Ibid.*

slaves such as Henry Bibb, Ellen Craft, Sojourner Truth, Henry Box Brown, Samuel Ringgold Ward, and Frederick Douglass spoke about their enslavement and provoked audiences to grapple with firsthand testimonies of the peculiar institution. In larger numbers than decades past, African American abolitionists used the domestic and international lecture circuit to strengthen abolitionist sentiments.²² Yet, merely mentioning the prominence of select African American antislavery activists belies the fissures throughout and the multiple movements of abolitionism. Scholars have argued that the marginalization of black abolitionists partly accounted for their later, more visible leadership positions.²³ Frederick Douglass' founding of the *North Star* and his split with William Lloyd Garrison are but two examples.

Dissatisfied with the prominence of white abolitionists' voices to the exclusion of their own testimonies as black men and women, some African American abolitionists advocated alternative strategies of accomplishing the abolition of slavery. Black leaders reestablished the black convention movement in 1843 as a space many believed to be overlooked or sidelined by their white peers. Moving within the circles of well-established abolitionist societies in Boston and New York City, Henry Box Brown and William Wells Brown adopted the new abolitionist strategy of exhibiting an antislavery panorama to sustain, ignite, and spread abolitionist fervor. Riding the swell of the moving panorama's popularity, Henry Box Brown, William Wells Brown, and J.P. Ball toured panoramas that significantly deviated from the moving panoramas of their predecessors. While African American antislavery activists used "the panoramic perspective" in

²² R.J.M. Blackett, *Beating Against the Barriers: Biographical Essays in Nineteenth Century Afro-American History* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1986); R.J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1983).

²³ Benjamin Quarles, *Black Abolitionists* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969); R.J.M. Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall: Black Americans in the Atlantic Abolitionist Movement, 1830-1860* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana University Press, 1983); W. Caleb McDaniel, "The Fourth and the First: Abolitionist Holidays, Respectability, and Radical Interracial Reform," *American Quarterly* 57, no.1 (March 2005): 129-151; Jane H. Pease and William H. Pease, *They Who Would Be Free: Blacks' Search for Freedom, 1830-1861* (New York: Atheneum, 1974); George A. Levesque, "Black Abolitionists in the Age of Jackson: Catalysts in the Radicalization of American Abolitionism," *Journal of Black Studies* 1, no.2 (December 1970): 187-201.

literature, as scholar Teresa Goddu has written, several black activists used the moving panorama to hasten the downfall of slavery.²⁴ Henry Box Brown, William Wells Brown, and James Presley Ball each invoked multiple, and sometimes different, claims of veracity and authenticity to aid in the cause of emancipation.

HENRY BOX BROWN AND THE PROVOCATIVE IMAGES REFLECTED BACK IN HIS *MIRROR OF SLAVERY*

Henry Box Brown's rise to fame was meteoric after he escaped slavery in a wooden box that a shipping company delivered to Philadelphia abolitionists in 1849. His improbable tale of flight and his desire for visibility within the abolitionist movement resulted in repeated invitations to recount his life story and bolster the anti-slavery cause. He toured New England and the Middle Atlantic states while lecturing about his life as an enslaved man, the process by which he escaped, and the necessity that slavery be eradicated. Brown's lectures coincided with the 1849 publication of his *Narrative of Henry Box Brown*, a story that further disseminated his life story to the many thousands who purchased the book.²⁵ Known to be a showman who often reenacted his escape from slavery in front of crowds of abolitionist supporters, Brown decided to give Bostonians something they had never seen before: a moving panorama highlighting the brutalities of slavery as described by its formerly enslaved narrator.

Brown gathered and instructed a team of men to create the moving panorama. He also acquired a partner, James Caesar Anthony Smith, the free black Virginian responsible for providing Brown with the name of the man who would later box him up and ship him to Philadelphia. Three men – Josiah Wolcott, and two men with the last names Rouse and Johnson – painted the panorama as Brown continued lecturing in New England. Little is known about the

²⁴ Teresa A. Goddu, "Anti-Slavery's Panoramic Perspective," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the U.S.* 39, no.2 (Summer 2014): 12-41.

²⁵ Henry Box Brown, *Narrative of the Life of Henry Box Brown Written by Himself* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), iv.

creation of the panorama other than the names of these artists and that the panorama required approximately “several months” of preparation, the majority of which, given the magnitude of the project, was probably dedicated to painting its tens of thousands of square feet of canvas.²⁶ While many booklets explaining the views of a particular panorama accompanied their exhibitions, no such accompanying description of Henry Box Brown’s panorama survives. There remain, however, several detailed testimonies and newspaper articles that communicate the disconcerting, amusing, and evocative performance of Henry Box Brown’s panorama experience. They reveal Brown’s use of several strategies to make the exhibition popular. Provocative advertisements, discounts for child visitors, the playing and singing of music, and the display of potentially alarming images were among these.²⁷ Brown regaled audiences with a spectacle – autobiographical, entertaining, and subversive – that detailed his life as a black man in the United States.

First attended by the public in April 1850, *Mirror of Slavery* marked one strategy to engender the end of slavery for Brown’s family members. One newspaper published a letter written by Brown for the public to contemplate:

I travel in the free states, and denounce slavery and slaveholders. I appeal to the public for assistance to buy my wife and children. I obtain the money; I offer it; I am refused. I raise more money; I offer twice their commercial value, and the reply of their owners is – you shall not have them. I have tried, sir, and others have tried, and the remorseless slaveholder still holds her and my children in bondage...²⁸

In the most immediate sense, Brown envisioned his panorama to produce the funds necessary to purchase the freedom for his family members. The subject matter of the *Mirror of Slavery*

²⁶ “Panorama Exhibition of the Slave System,” *Liberator*, April 19, 1850, 62. The names of the three painters can be found in the advertisement “Concert-Hall, Lord Nelson Street,” *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), November 15, 1850, 1.

²⁷ For more on the construction of entertainment spectacle that played into audience expectations, fears, and desires in this era, see James W. Cook, *The Arts of Deception: Playing With Fraud in the Age of Barnum* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2001).

²⁸ “An Illustration of the Slavery System,” *Manchester Times* (Manchester, England), November 27, 1852, 1.

however, conveyed an urgent need for mass emancipation in the United States. Brown's panorama exhibited gruesome scenes of violence and pleasing, picturesque landscapes in Boston, Massachusetts before his flight to England following the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act. Given the pressing drive to purchase the freedom of his yet enslaved family, Brown had great incentive to ensure the financial success of his panorama. Unlike those panoramas principally concerned with displaying topographical views, the *Mirror of Slavery* refocused the viewer's attention on the inhumanity of slavery for the intention of dismantling slavery. The presence, rather than the absence or marginality, of non-white figures marked a shift in Brown's panorama. Rather than reproducing the figures of enslaved people at the literal and figurative margins of the panorama canvas, Brown dedicated the panoramic experience to showing enslaved people and the historical, economic, and social contexts in which they labored. The prominence and centrality of black figures in Brown's moving panorama marked a change in the moving panoramas before it. Brown sublimated the conventional visual trappings of the landscape panorama – landscape scenes primarily driving the narrative and avoiding explicit narratives of controversial contemporary debates – for the sake of presenting viewers of the *Mirror of Slavery* with the pressing message to abolish slavery.

Divided into two parts, the forty-six scenes that comprised Brown's *Mirror of Slavery* told a story of slavery in the United States that began with the African Slave Trade and ended with universal emancipation. Part I condensed the narrative of free Africans living peacefully, their capture by Europeans, their transportation to North America, and their enslavement in a Charleston, South Carolina workhouse into twenty scenes. This rapid acceleration of time and rapid shortening of geographical distance efficiently conveyed the information that Brown desired to have represented in the exhibition. The simplified movement between locations and

time periods highlighted the deliberate inclusion and exclusion of subject matter that ultimately urged the abolition of slavery. Furthermore, the movement of the canvas played an essential role in introducing new scenes and the complex cultural meaning of the *Mirror of Slavery*. The movement of the canvas mirrored the movements of enslaved people in their flight from slavery in Part II of the panorama. As such, the form of the panoramic medium followed the function of Brown's antislavery message.

Brown and his business partner, James C.A. Smith, utilized several strategies to increase the popularity of the *Mirror of Slavery*. First and foremost, advertisements heralded both the arrival and continuation of the panorama's exhibitions. In keeping with mid-nineteenth century advertisements, exaggeration played a key role. Repeatedly billed as being "painted on 50,000 feet of canvas," the *Mirror of Slavery* appealed to audience members' desire to be captivated by a large scale art form or the enormity of what Angela Miller has called "the spectacular."²⁹ Such a massive scale could be especially impressive to young attendees of the panorama whom Brown and Smith regularly admitted for half price. This strategy exposed greater numbers of people to the panorama, profited the proprietors, and provided a comparative financial incentive to bring children. The attendees – youth and adults alike – enjoyed the music performed at many exhibitions of the *Mirror of Slavery*. Incorporating various genres of music such as sacred, instrumental, vocal, and even "plantation melodies" into the panoramic experience proved to be exceedingly popular with audiences.³⁰

While encouraging attendees of the panorama to experience the views as authentic and truthful, the shifting content of the panorama also played an important role in the experience of a multimedia anti-slavery production. Interspersed among the scenes detailing the horrors of the

²⁹ Angela Miller, "The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular."

³⁰ "Panorama of American Slavery," *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, England), December 18, 1850, 5.

African Slave Trade in Part I were nods to tropes of the panorama genre. Views entitled “Beautiful Lake and Mountain Scenery in Africa,” “View of the Cape of Good Hope,” “Gorgeous Scenery of the West India Islands,” and “View of Charleston, South Carolina” presented audiences with landscape scenes that had made the medium of the panorama famous. Furthermore, given the conventions of the panoramic medium, the audience also *expected* to see the landscape views. Many of his audience members, especially those in England, would never visit all or even one of the locations depicted in the *Mirror of Slavery*. Thus, Brown employed strategies to encourage observers of his panorama to trust his claims of authenticity and credibility.

The contrast between freedom and slavery intensified in Part II of the *Mirror of Slavery* as enslaved people battled the forces of slavery with the hope of winning liberty. The beginning of Part II offered audiences members some reprieve from the violence in Part I. The first four views depicted common events or tasks that an audience member might see if they visited the Southern United States. Scenes of a sugar plantation, a cotton plantation, “Women at Work,” and “Sunday Among the Slave Population” detailed the conditions of enslavement. Taken together, they displayed a range of the work that enslaved people performed. Coupled with the violence in Part I, these scenes of subjugation laid the foundation for a series of views that depicted the escapes of Ellen Craft, Henry Bibb, Henry Box Brown, and unnamed “Nubians, escaping by night.” Symbols and places representing liberty – “George Washington’s tomb,” “Jefferson’s Rock,” and a distant view of “Philadelphia” – echoed the attempts at freedom undertaken by these fugitive slaves. In several scenes, these efforts are met with severe violence. Scenes of the “Whipping Post and Gallows in Richmond, Va.,” “Slave Prisons at Washington,” “Nubian Slaves Retaken,” and “Burning Alive” mark both the threats and the consequences suffered by

enslaved people. The extreme violence established by these juxtapositions served to illustrate the necessity for emancipation. With scenes of Henry Box Brown's arrival in Philadelphia, "West Indian Emancipation," and the closing scene of the panorama, "Universal Emancipation," the *Mirror of Slavery* found hope in both realized and imagined reality.

One way of inducing support for the antislavery cause involved appealing to the audiences' expectations for the landscape scenery that they turned out in droves to see at other panorama exhibitions. Indeed, many audience members enjoyed the landscape scenery presented in the *Mirror of Slavery*. One reviewer noted that "all persons were highly gratified with the splendid views of American scenery" and another commented that the panorama proffered "some of most picturesque scenery of the New World" of any panorama.³¹ Another marveled at the "tranquil beauty and magnificent grandeur of African scenery" presented in the first half of the exhibition.³² The views of scenery did not merely impress; they both calmed and excited. One viewer recalled that "[t]he tranquil beauty and magnificent grandeur of African scenery are brought before the eye" when viewing the panorama.³³ Viewers took note of the free Africans' "enjoyment of his freedom [a]midst his own beautiful lake and mountain scenery" before the slave trade initiated "his arrival at the auction mart of the freest country of the world."³⁴ The confined interior of the auction house starkly contrasted with the freedom, beauty, and pleasing elements of the African and New World panoramic views. The majority of people reading these words as well as those attending the panorama would never visit Africa, Latin America, or the United States and so the images of Latin America and several cities in the United States regaled audiences who would only vicariously experience such people and places. The landscape scenes

³¹ "Horrors of Slavery in America," *The Leeds Mercury*, May 3, 1851, 10 and "New and Original Panorama or Mirror of American Slavery," *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), November 8, 1850, 6.

³² "Mirror of Slavery," *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), November 19, 1850, 4.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ "Mr. Henry Box Brown and Smith's Mirror of Slavery," *Liverpool Mercury*, November 15, 1850, 8.

could briefly transport the viewers to distant continents to experience vicariously the sights of foreign lands that most would never otherwise visit. This “armchair travel” lent the moving panorama an element of the spectacular in which the “travails of actual experience were displaced by an expedited, edited, and misleadingly simple passage through a simulated reality.”³⁵ One reviewer, as though countering potential naysayers, wrote that “[t]his is no fancied sketch, but one which many stand ready to vouch for in reality.”³⁶ Though a simulated reality, viewers of Brown’s *Mirror of Slavery* applauded what they wrote to be the authentic nature of the images illuminated before them.

The *Mirror of Slavery* traded in the performance of persuasion by depicting both beauty and horror. One attendee celebrated the panorama as a “brilliant work of art” which also “represent[ed] in a graphic manner the chief features of that fearful scourge – slavery.”³⁷ The choice of the word “scourge” allowed for a double meaning both as a “whip” – a physical threat and punishment – and as a source of calamity. The multiple forms of violence depicted in the *Mirror of Slavery* resulted in the word “horror” to be the most commonly published word describing the panorama.³⁸ Frequently used in the phrase “the horrors of slavery,” the word “horrors” included an expansive range of experiences. Sometimes the depictions proved to be overwhelming to viewers. One writer captured the juxtaposition of beauty and horror when he recorded that “[a]ll persons were highly gratified with the splendid views of American scenery,

³⁵ Miller, “The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular,” 41.

³⁶ “Mirror of Slavery,” *Boston Herald*, May 1, 1850, 4.

³⁷ “American Slavery,” *Preston Guardian* (Preston, England), January 25, 1851, 3.

³⁸ At least 9 reviews mentioned used the word “horror” and its lexical derivatives. See: “Mr. Henry Box Brown and Smith’s Mirror of Slavery,” *Liverpool Mercury*, November 15, 1850, 8; “Horrors of Slavery in America,” *The Leeds Mercury*, May 3, 1851, 10; “The Mirror of American Slavery,” *The Leeds Mercury*, May 24, 1851, 5; “Prize Essays,” *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, England), October 8, 1851, 7; “American Slavery,” *Manchester Guardian*, August 30, 1851, 10; “American Slavery,” *Preston Guardian* (Preston, England), January 25, 1851, 3; “Panorama of Slavery,” *Preston Guardian* (Preston, England), March 5, 1853, 4; “American Slavery,” *Preston Guardian* (Preston, England), March 1, 1851, 5; “New York, Aug. 17th, 1852,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, August 27, 1852, 3.

but were horrified on witnessing the curse of slavery as depicted and carried on in the United States.”³⁹ He continued by writing that “a gentleman called out when the performance was half done ‘Mr. Brown, we have seen sufficient; not that we are tired, but you show too much for so little a charge.’”⁴⁰ It seems unlikely that the man who interrupted the panorama actually wanted to pay more money to view the *Mirror of Slavery*; it is more likely that the man’s phrase “we have seen sufficient” referred to the violence of slavery and that he required no more convincing of the horrors of slavery. Brown’s panorama proved amply convincing. The depictions of slavery in the United States proved too much for the man due to them being “just and vivid” which were the words used by a newspaper editor to describe Brown’s “conception of the horrors of slavery.”⁴¹ Brown’s “simple, earnest, and unadorned eloquence” coupled with the “graphically delineated” “horrors of the slave trade” disturbed observers.⁴² These factors aided in the persuasively appeal of Brown’s panorama. This should come as no surprise since, in the words of another observer, Brown’s panorama possessed a “startling vividness that leaves no doubt of the inherent depravity of man.”⁴³ Provoking and then utilizing this realization precisely mirrored Brown’s panoramic intentions to persuade his audience of the horrors of slavery.

In alternating between serene and distressing scenes, Brown seized the panorama’s “ability to reproduce an experience in its maximum visual intensity.”⁴⁴ The landscapes intended to impress viewers with their beauty often followed and preceded starkly different scenes of religious sacrifice and the march of slaves to the coasts of Africa. For example, the view depicting the “Gorgeous Scenery of the West Indian Islands” immediately followed a scene depicting an interior of a slave market. The auction of an enslaved African family immediately

³⁹ “Horrors of Slavery in America,” *The Leeds Mercury*, May 3, 1851, 10.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ “Panorama of Slavery,” *Preston Guardian* (Preston, England), March 5, 1853, 4.

⁴² “Mr. Henry Box Brown and Smith’s *Mirror of Slavery*,” *Liverpool Mercury*, November 15, 1850, 8.

⁴³ “*Mirror of Slavery*,” *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), November 19, 1850, 4.

⁴⁴ Angela Miller, “The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular,” 49.

followed a panoramic view of the city of Charleston, South Carolina. Certainly many of the scenes caused discomfort among their viewers, even those knowledgeable of the brutalities perpetuated under slavery. For example, a scene entitled “Brand and Scourge” detailed the burning of enslaved people with hot metal. While the landscape views often gave context for the following scenes, they also resulted in a progression of views marked by striking differences. The contrast between various scenes of starkly dissimilar emotional registers increased the affective intensity of the panorama. One moment, an audience member could marvel at the azure waters of the Caribbean, and in the next, find herself appalled at the depiction of human trafficking. Framed differently, the crests of emotion provoked by the narrative content of the *Mirror of Slavery* could intensify the emotional troughs, and vice versa.

The lucid portrayals of slavery in the *Mirror of Slavery* convinced some attendees of the injustices of slavery. One review underscored the transformative possibility of Brown’s panorama and firmly advocated on its behalf:

We would urge our readers to visit this panorama; and if any of them have thought lightly of the injustice done by America to three millions and a half of our fellow-creatures, we feel assured they will leave the exhibition in another frame of mind.⁴⁵

The editor’s request to both those readers who “thought lightly” of slavery in the United States and those who did not demonstrated the wide appeal of the panorama. More importantly, the editor’s faith that witnessing the panorama would provoke them to consider more seriously slavery in the United States revealed the extent to which anti-slavery visual culture was thought to convert people to recognize slavery’s inherent injustice. The editor’s review underscores the point that the medium of the panorama inculcated the lesson that slavery in the United States was deeply unjust. By mentioning the three and a half million enslaved people, the editor stressed the enormous scale of slavery and connected the audience members with those people depicted in

⁴⁵ “Mr. Henry Box Brown and Smith’s *Mirror of Slavery*,” *Liverpool Mercury*, November 15, 1850, 8.

Brown's panorama. The panorama, therefore, caused the editor to think more expansively about the institution of slavery in the United States; it affected exponentially more lives than those depicted in Brown's exhibition. The experience of Brown's panorama triggered a heartrending connection to be made between an expansive length of canvas and the realities of enslavement.

Some reviewers raved that Brown's panorama could invigorate and advance the antislavery cause in ways that antislavery lecturers and other abolitionist strategies had not. "From the opinion of persons who have encouraged this moral and instructive diorama, this exhibition," wrote one reporter, "if wisely conducted, will create more in favor of philanthropy than a legion of such anti-slavery lecturers as now swarm the community."⁴⁶ The reviewer hinted that the panorama would compel more financial support for the anti-slavery cause than the anti-slavery lecture circuit. His use of the word "swarm" suggested that not only had several lecturers attempted to bolster the anti-slavery cause, but in doing so, irritated those to whom they appealed. Large numbers of antislavery activists, especially formerly enslaved African Americans like Henry Box Brown, traveled to the British Isles during the 1840 and early 1850s to engender antislavery sentiments with their peripatetic abolitionist lectures. Though activists had long visited Europe to elicit antislavery support, the uptick in black, transatlantic activism marked a powerful method of authenticating black self-representation to an international community in the hope of intensifying pressure on the United States to end slavery.⁴⁷ To describe the number of antislavery lecturers as a "swarm," however, hinted at lecture fatigue. The reviewer understood Brown and his panorama to breathe new life into the anti-slavery cause. The novel format of the panorama enabled the "spectacular," provided a bevy of lessons about slavery in the United States, and took advantage of several techniques for inducing support for abolitionism.

⁴⁶ "Mirror of Slavery," *Boston Herald*, May 1, 1850, 4.

⁴⁷ Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*.

The persuasiveness of the panorama's message in part depended on its visual execution. Reviews of Brown's panorama frequently note its artistic dimensions that on the one hand visually impressed viewers, and on the other hand, helped impress its anti-slavery messages. Encouraging members of the public to patronize Brown's panorama, one reviewer wrote that "the paintings are well worthy of inspection" while another labeled it an "elegant work of art."⁴⁸ Still another praised the *Mirror of Slavery* as a "great production of art," the purpose of such critical acclaim became more focused when reviewers specified the effects of the highly esteemed piece of art.⁴⁹ "No one can see it," wrote another reviewer, "without getting new views and more vivid conceptions of the practical working of the system than be had before."⁵⁰ This reviewer pinpointed one of the effects of both the subject matter and the visual execution of the panorama; "more vivid conceptions" of the institution of slavery. The panorama thereby acted as an art form that animated "new views" of the slavery. It offered its viewers a more expansive understanding of slavery by confronting viewers with elements of slavery with which they may not have grappled. As such, the *Mirror of Slavery* enabled the expansion of the attendees' visual vocabulary of slavery and a broader conception of the history and practice of slavery.

Part of the persuasive power of Brown's panorama rested in its ability to educate. Contemporaries believed the *Mirror of Slavery* to be an educational flashpoint concerning slavery in the United States. While several viewers believed Brown exhibited the panorama "for the purpose of enlightening the English mind with respect to slavery," many reviewers envisioned British youth to benefit greatly from attending Brown's panorama. The landscape scenery marked one important subject about which they could learn. "The young especially

⁴⁸ "American Slavery," *Blackburn Standard* (Blackburn, England), April 9, 1851, 3; "Concert-Hall, Lord Nelson-Street," *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), November 15, 1850, 1.

⁴⁹ "Mirror of Slavery," *Boston Herald*, May 1, 1850, 4.

⁵⁰ *Massachusetts Spy* (Worcester, MA) May 15, 1850, 8 as cited in Jeffrey Ruggles, *The Unboxing of Henry Brown* (Richmond, VA: The Library of Virginia, 2003), 89.

should not neglect the opportunity [to attend the panorama],” wrote one journalist, “as they may derive more information from the impressive scenery than they can do from the perusal of many works written on the subject.”⁵¹ Such promotion encouraged both parents and children to see the show. That the multimedia experience of the panorama, undoubtedly coupled with its subject matter, promised to be more fruitful than many text-based resources about slavery demonstrates that power of personal testimony and visual education. Brown encouraged the attendance of children by offering them half-price admission in several towns and also advertised that “the scholars and teachers in Sunday schools would be admitted by special arrangement.”⁵² As one attendee wrote, “there are other sources of interest, replete with lessons of instruction” that both children and adults alike could glean by “pay[ing] Mr. Brown a visit.”⁵³ The same writer recorded that “Mr. Brown is making arrangements with schools for attendance at his morning exhibitions.”⁵⁴ Students had the opportunity to hear and see the experiences of the African slave trade and slavery in the United States narrated by a formerly enslaved man. Evidently, “[a] vast number of individuals, including a great number of school children” in several cities Brown toured, and, according to one viewer, “all of whom have been gratified by their visit.”⁵⁵

Those observers whom the panorama did not gratify revealed that they spurned its claims of veracity and authenticity because they doubted its educational value and did not trust Brown himself. Though the views were “generally good,” one witness testified, “some of them appear to exceed the limits of probability.”⁵⁶ The focus of the observer’s doubt rested in Brown’s depictions of slavery and its extreme violence. The disbelief of one William Benjamin Smith, the

⁵¹ “American Slavery,” *Leeds Mercury* (Leeds, England), April 19, 1851, 10.

⁵² “New and Original Panorama!” *Liberator*, April 26, 1850, 67; “The Mirror of American Slavery,” *The Leeds Mercury*, May 24, 1851, 5.

⁵³ “Mirror of Slavery,” *Liverpool Mercury* (Liverpool, England), November 19, 1850, 4.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ “American Slavery,” *Preston Guardian* (Preston, England), January 25, 1851, 3.

⁵⁶ “American Slavery,” *Blackburn Standard* (Blackburn, England), April 9, 1851, 3.

editor of the *Wolverhampton Herald and Birmingham Mercury*, manifested itself in a scathing condemnation of Brown and his panorama in March, 1852. “[A] gross and palpable exaggeration,” according to Smith, the *Mirror of Slavery* should be attended by those “expect[ing] only amusement” and not an education of slavery.⁵⁷ Smith denied the authenticity of Brown’s panorama by citing several other sources that allegedly revealed the true nature of slavery in the Southern states. Smith pitted “pictorial illustrations of the southern states, given to us by Banvard, Risley, Smith, Russell, and other artists,” testimony of those who had visited slave states, and, ironically, “the statements of even former slaves themselves” against the truth claims Brown and his panorama.⁵⁸ The editor’s words reflected his doubt that Brown himself had been an enslaved man in the United States. They further demonstrated that the panoramas exhibited by Banvard, Risley, Smith, and Russell indeed convinced viewers of their purported veracity.

The editor’s doubts of the panorama’s claims to truthfully represent enslavement did not stop at attacks on the authenticity of the panorama. Smith described Brown as a “bejeweled ‘darkey,’ whose portly figure and overdressed appearance bespeak the gullibility of our most credulous age and nation.”⁵⁹ When framed as an ostentatious figure hawking snake oil to naive and susceptible audiences, Brown posed a threat to the public; he took their money and in return proffered an exhibition that sated their desire to know the violently exotic world of slavery as told by a man claiming to have once been a part of it. “The representation, to our thinking, instead of benefitting the case of abolition,” wrote Smith, “is likely from its want of *vraisemblance* [sic] and decency, to generate disgust at the foppery, conceit, vanity, and

⁵⁷ “Assize Intelligence,” *Daily News* (London, England), July 31, 1852, 3.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

egotistical stupidity of the Box Brown school.”⁶⁰ Speaking with the weight of the newspaper behind him, Smith continued:

We therefore caution those who may attend to expect only amusement, as the horrors related in the richest nigger style are as good as pantomime, and to be chary in giving evidence to the astounding and horrified details with which Box Brown overwhelms his wide-mouthed and wonder-gaping audiences.⁶¹

After repeatedly insulting the panorama, Brown himself, and the crowds attended the *Mirror of Slavery*, the numbers of people attending the panorama dropped off precipitously after the review’s publication. The lack of income resulting from the diminished attendance prompted Brown to leave Wolverhampton for Lancashire, but not before nixing the idea of exhibiting the panorama in the Birmingham district due to the noxious reach of Smith’s article. On July 30, 1852, Brown and a team of lawyers presented Smith’s article as evidence in a libel case brought against Smith. The editor’s published objurgation, coupled with a register of receipts detailing the sharp decline in attendance in Wolverhampton, resulted in the judge and jury awarding Henry Box Brown more than 100£ in damages.⁶²

Smith’s words revealed more about racial ideologies that shaped perceptions of African Americans than they revealed about Brown himself. As evidenced by his fixation on Brown’s jewelry, corporeality, and attire, Smith believed Brown’s visual presentation to be incongruous with Smith’s perceived notion of acceptable blackness. As scholar Daphne Brooks has argued, Smith’s labeling of Brown’s performance to be “in the richest nigger style” rife with stereotypical dialect underscored Smith’s categorizing not only Brown’s showmanship but also

⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² This was not the first time that Henry Box Brown used the English court system to his benefit. He had previously brought charges in an English court against John Leucy, a man who had worked for Brown as a sceneshifter for the *Mirror of Slavery*. A borough court charged and committed Leucy for trial in January 1850 after he allegedly stole 87 texts – 27 copies of the *Narrative of Henry Box Brown* and 60 unbound parts of the Brown’s *Anti-Slavery Harp* – and sold them to an acquaintance. See “Stealing Books,” *Manchester Guardian* (Manchester, England), January 7, 1852, 7.

his character as part of the realm of blackface minstrelsy than with respectable antislavery advocacy.⁶³ In fact, that Smith warned readers to doubt the veracity of Brown's panorama *because* he believed Brown to present a persona of social aloofness and gross extravagance demonstrated his attempt to reinforce a series of racial hierarchy through social codes determined and enforced by a white subject. In other words, Smith's written word acted as its own performance because it "shift[ed] the referent of Box Brown's performance so as to return it to the realm of white authorial control."⁶⁴ The perception that Brown overstepped the social and cultural boundaries presumed for African Americans and deserved to be not merely publically censured, but forsaken by patrons, elucidated the racial strictures structuring the freedoms of Henry Box Brown.

Media coverage of the trial provided further glimpses into the composition of the audience that attended the *Mirror of Slavery*. The coverage revealed that Brown began exhibiting the *Mirror of Slavery* on March 15, and, for two nights, considerable crowds attended. Charging one shilling for prime seats, six pence for second tier seats, four pence for third tier seats, and admitting schoolchildren for half price, Brown collected 7£ the first night and 9£ and 9s the second night.⁶⁵ This translated to a minimum of 140 people the first night and 189 people the second night, though those numbers were impossibly low since not everyone could purchase primary seats, making the likely attendance to be closer to 200 and 270, respectively. "Clergymen and others who had an interest in schools" attended those nights. Smith sat among these attendees on March 15. With an informed estimate of the size of the audience in Wolverhampton, one scholar estimated that Henry Box Brown exhibited the *Mirror of Slavery* as

⁶³ Daphne Brooks has also argued that Smith used rhetoric of blackface minstrelsy in denouncing Henry Box Brown. See Brooks, *Bodies in Dissent*, 98-99.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, 98.

⁶⁵ "Assize Intelligence," *Daily News* (London, England), July 31, 1852, 3.

many as two thousand times, it is probable that many tens of thousands of people viewed the panorama.⁶⁶

With the exception of Smith's editorial maligning, Henry Box Brown's panorama enjoyed widespread acclaim and publicity during its exhibition. As entertainment, it appealed to people desiring to view expertly delineated paintings and to learn about slavery in the United States. Advertisements noting Brown's status as a formerly enslaved man marked him as an authentic and credible source for his depictions of slavery. With few published exceptions, audience members invested Brown, his life story, and his panorama with their belief in the multimedia testimonies of slavery. Imbued with the trust of veracity and authenticity, Brown harnessed multiple strategies to heighten the popularity of his panorama. He satisfied his audience's expectations for viewing panoramic scenes but interspersed the panorama with scenes of subjection that created contrasts of subject matter and emotion. All served to educate and persuade audiences of the injustices of slavery and the necessity for its dissolution. The work of securing emancipation for his wife and family ultimately proved beyond Brown's abilities, but in the process of working to free them, he heightened the visibility of the antislavery cause in the United States and the perils to which enslaved people were subjected.

FOCUSING ON THE ENSLAVED PEOPLE IN WILLIAM WELLS BROWN'S PANORAMA

The parallels between the panoramas and intentions of Henry Box Brown and William Wells Brown, another formerly enslaved man who toured a panorama of slavery in the early 1850s, are numerous. William Wells Brown marshaled the panorama as a medium to persuade audiences in England and Scotland that slavery in the United States must be abolished. In doing so, his moving panorama increased the visibility of the brutalities of slavery while its admission

⁶⁶ James Ruggles, *The Unboxing of Henry Box Brown*, 104.

fees raised funds for antislavery anti-slavery organizations in the United States. William Wells Brown envisioned his panoramic enterprise to realize freedom for enslaved people en masse much like Henry Box Brown envisioned his panorama to secure the freedom of his family. As his surviving panorama booklet documents, Wells Brown specifically identified the moving panorama as a medium that held the promise to cogently and efficiently convince its viewers of the depravity of slavery. He created a moving panorama because of its ability to spread antislavery beliefs, due in part by its literal movement of the panorama among locales and its popularity among audiences at the beginning of the 1850s. William Wells Brown envisioned his panorama to accelerate the destruction of slavery by shifting public sentiment in favor of the antislavery cause and by lining its coffers with the proceeds of his antislavery panorama.

Key differences in the panoramas of William Wells Brown and Henry Box Brown revealed additional strategies to persuade audiences of the injustices of slavery and encourage audience members' emotional investment in the future of enslaved people living in the United States. The booklet that accompanied Wells Brown's panorama divulged conscious strategies he used to heighten the believability of his panorama's message. Brown invoked claims of authenticity and veracity to heighten observers' acceptance of his message, but he also explicitly attempted to impart a vicarious experience upon its viewer. Though consisting of fewer views as Box Brown's panorama, Wells Brown dedicated the majority of his scenes to the depiction of enslaved people. The further inclusion of people marked a movement further away from the panoramas' disposition for topography toward a panorama that placed enslaved men and women center stage.

William Wells Brown's life as an enslaved man informed the content and thrust of the panorama that he exhibited. Born in Kentucky in 1814, he lived most of his twenty years as an

enslaved man in Missouri. Over these two decades, Brown experienced much of what would later be depicted in the panorama he displayed in Europe. Several attempts to free himself from bondage resulted in whippings, being hunted by dogs, and severe beatings. Brown performed a variety of tasks for those to whom he had been hired out: he labored in fields, acted as servant, and obliged as coachman. One of his many employers, James Walker, forced Brown to travel the slave-owning lands along the Mississippi River and lead slave caravans to be sold at the New Orleans slave markets. After a successful escape from slavery in 1834, Brown enjoyed success as a noted antislavery lecturer and the author of his 1847 autobiography, the *Narrative of William W. Brown, a Fugitive Slave*. Escaped slave narratives and the anti-slavery lecture circuit, two popular forms of self-expression marshaled by formerly enslaved men and women, were strategies for spreading abolitionist sentiments that had increased the visibility and the financial coffers of abolitionist societies during the 1840s. Brown paired his memories of slavery with his experience as a moving antislavery lecturer, outspoken temperance advocate, and skillful autobiographical writer.⁶⁷ Brown fashioned a panorama to persuade viewers to contribute to campaigns that would end slavery in the United States.

Witnessing the exhibition of a moving panorama inspired William Wells Brown to commission his own. Brown revealed his motivations for commissioning the panorama, the visual corrective of slavery advanced by his panorama, and his belief that his antislavery panorama would aid in ending slavery in the United States. The first sentence of the preface documented Brown's attendance at a panorama of the Mississippi River shown in Boston during the autumn of 1847. He continued:

I was somewhat amazed at the very mild manner in which the "Peculiar Institution" of the Southern States was there represented, and it occurred to me that a painting, with as fair a

⁶⁷ See the forthcoming book by Ezra Greenspan, *William Wells Brown: An African American Life* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2014).

representation of American Slavery as could be given upon canvass, would do much to disseminate truth upon this subject, and hasten the downfall [sic] of the greatest evil that now stains the character of the American people.⁶⁸

Brown had attended the famous panorama created by John Banvard that had attracted more than a quarter of a million Bostonians in 1847 and posted a profit of approximately \$50,000.⁶⁹ Though Banvard's panorama is no longer extant, the pamphlet that accompanied it described its sole mention of enslaved people and its several views of plantations with romanticized and superlative language. In one view, "slaves working in the cotton fields" worked on "a large and beautiful island" on "fine cotton plantations" among "beautiful mansions of the planters" "and lofty cypress trees, the pride of the Southern forests."⁷⁰ The "splendid sugar plantations" of Louisiana, the planters living in the "romantically situated" Natchez, Mississippi, and a "view of a plantation with all its busy and cheerful accompaniments" proved problematic for William Wells Brown.⁷¹ In envisioning his own panorama that could prove popular and lucrative, Brown believed the moving panorama held promise for an antislavery audience, or, an audience to be converted to the antislavery cause.

While many praised Banvard's panorama, Brown immediately identified what he believed its limitations – namely its representation of chattel slavery. He described its scenes of enslavement as "very mild" and evidently pondered for several years the decision to create his own panorama to challenge the inadequacy of Banvard's panorama. Banvard's panorama took viewers on a journey of the varying landscapes, as seen from the Mississippi River, southward from St. Louis to New Orleans. In response to the "the very mild" depictions of slavery, Brown inverted the focus from landscape to black bodies and enslavement. Like the black people

⁶⁸ Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown's Original Panoramic Views*, 2.

⁶⁹ John Hanners, *The Adventures of an Artist: John Banvard (1815-1891) and his Mississippi Panorama* (Ph.D. Dissertation, Michigan State University, 1979), 65.

⁷⁰ *Description of Banvard's Panorama of the Mississippi River* (Boston: John Putnam, 1847), 27.

⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 31, 29, 42.

depicted in Banvard's other paintings, the enslaved people he depicted in his panorama were likely physically small, rhetorically tangential figures.⁷² In contrast, almost every description of the two-dozen scenes in Brown's panorama highlighted that enslaved people were central to his scenes. What was shown unsatisfactorily in Banvard's panorama became the focal point of more than a thousand feet of Brown's. William Wells Brown not only altered the medium of the panorama by changing *what* people saw, he instructed them on *how* they should see it.

It was no small endeavor to create as "fair a representation of American Slavery as could be given upon canvass" in order to "disseminate truth upon this subject, and hasten the downfall [sic]" of slavery. Just two years earlier, Brown seemed to be of the mindset that no one could represent slavery. When speaking to members of the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem, Massachusetts, Brown explained:

Slavery has never been represented; Slavery never can be represented... I may try to represent to you Slavery as it is; another may follow me and try to represent the condition of the Slave; we may all represent it as we think it is, and yet we shall all fail to represent the real condition of the Slave.⁷³

Brown's words conveyed the idea that providing the totality of enslavement proved an impossible feat; each depiction would inevitably exclude the details of another person's experience of enslavement. Nevertheless, after Brown moved to England in 1849, he drew up plans for a panorama depicting slavery in the United States as a means to show people the truth about slavery that he believed to be lacking in Banvard's popular panorama. Brown's cultural production marked a direct and pointed refutation of the representation of slavery viewed by hundreds of thousands of people in the United States. Not only refuting but also subverting the then- dominant discourse of blackness vis-à-vis slavery, Brown fashioned himself into a cultural

⁷² John Hanners, "John Banvard's Mississippi Panorama" in *American History Illustrated* 17, no.4 (July 1982), 32.

⁷³ *A Lecture delivered before the Female Anti-Slavery Society of Salem* (Boston: Anti-Slavery Office, 1847) as cited in Ezra Greenspan, ed., *William Wells Brown: A Reader* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008), 108.

producer charging with spreading his countercultural panorama. Viewers would see that Brown's panorama subverted racial stereotypes popular in visual culture and produced counternarratives in the service of antislavery.

Much of what can be known about Brown's panorama survives in the form of an explanatory booklet that accompanied Brown's display of the panorama. The panorama is not extant, which leaves the booklet as the main guides to the subject matter and the intentions of the panorama's exhibition. Published in London by Charles Gilpin, the booklet included information about each of the twenty-four scenes that comprised Brown's panorama. It began with a preface that testified to the authenticity of the scenes presented in the panorama. Descriptions of each scene of the panorama followed with varying amounts of editorial information. The conclusion of the publication included several descriptions of fundraising efforts of abolitionists in the United States and a list of women in twenty-eight cities spread across England, Ireland, and Scotland who had volunteered to collect funds to be sent to the Boston Female Anti-Slavery Society. The booklet ended with a reprinted letter from William Wells Brown to his former master, Enoch Price, and a page of testimonials celebrating Brown's *Narrative*.

Brown's deliberate choices to incorporate subject matter in his panorama resulted in what he believed to represent more truthfully the lives of enslaved black Americans than Banvard's panorama. In the booklet that accompanied the panorama, Brown detailed his methodology for the creation of the twenty-four scenes in his traveling panorama. Brown first collected "a number of sketches of plantations in the Slave States" and later "succeeded in obtaining a series of sketches of beautiful and interesting American scenery."⁷⁴ He assembled a team of artists who then copied the drawings that he had procured "after considerable pains and expense."⁷⁵ It might

⁷⁴ Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown's Original Panoramic Views*, 2.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 4.

be no surprise then for some British attendees to have recognized visual elements of the panorama from American abolitionist literature. Brown aggregated and adapted images to form a visual foundation from which he constructed his panorama of slavery. Drawing from his personal experience as an enslaved man, William Wells Brown took license to privilege certain bits of information in his panorama. Though observers of his panorama saw this in Brown's dedication of more than half his panorama to depicting enslaved life in the Southern states, they also listened to Brown's own narration of the panorama and his description of the scenes. Though the precise language of these lectures is unknown, the language used by Brown represented his deliberate selection of anecdotes meant to inspire the ultimate end of slavery.

Like then-common claims to convince members of the public of the veracity of a narrative, Brown testified to the truth of the ideas contained in the panorama when he wrote in the preface of the booklet that "many of the scenes I have myself witnessed."⁷⁶ He highlighted his status as a formerly enslaved man and the firsthand testimony of his nearly twenty years of enslavement. Both examples signified Brown's strategies to affirm and reaffirm the credibility of the views to be seen in his panorama.⁷⁷ Furthermore, Brown buttressed his claims of the twenty-four scenes' authenticity by writing that "the truthfulness of all of them is well known to those who are familiar with the Anti-Slavery literature of America."⁷⁸ His reference to the abolitionist literature revealed that he expected some viewers to be familiar with abolitionist literature from across the Atlantic. It also underscored his implicit assumption that his audience members understood abolitionist literature from the United States to represent truths about slavery. As one attendee of the panorama noted, "all disgusting details of American slavery, which would be

⁷⁶ Ibid., 2.

⁷⁷ Much of the most powerful antislavery literature produced by abolitionists until 1850 included escaped slave narratives which were rife with multiple claims of the truth of the escaped enslaved person's story. See Fabian, *The Unvarnished Truth*.

⁷⁸ Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown's Original Panoramic Views*, 2.

offensive to English taste, are withheld, and exaggeration has been scrupulously avoided.”⁷⁹ The cultivated strategy of omitting especially heinous imagery marked one way to heighten the believability of the information displayed in the panorama. The reviewer elucidated that this authorial choice was another way to appeal to a larger audience. Furthermore, Brown advertised the panorama to be composed “from Sketches chiefly taken on the Spot” to convey both the veracity and the authenticity of the information he exhibited.⁸⁰ This marked a strategy not only for attracting viewers to his panorama, but also convincing them to donate money to the cause of antislavery.

For Brown, claims to authenticity also involved the excision of certain elements of slavery to which some would object. When deciding on the views of slavery to be included in his panorama, Brown wrote that he “refrained from representing those disgusting pictures of vice and cruelty which are inseparable from Slavery; so that whatever may be said of my Views, I am sure that the Slaveowners of America can have nothing to complain of on the score of exaggeration.”⁸¹ He assumed that slaveowners would object to visual depictions of slavery during the panorama's exhibition. Such an assumption implied that Brown expected slaveowners to comprise some of the panorama's viewers. It seemed that he decided not to display these images to circumvent claims by slaveholders that "exaggeration" sullied or invalidated the "truth" of Brown's panorama. Regardless of the reason, Brown's decision made his panorama more appealing and respectable to audiences, especially women and children; displaying gory images of the brutality experienced by enslaved people or graphic images of rape surely would have prevented some potential patrons from attending. Preempting possible claims of fictive

⁷⁹ “General Intelligence, *Christian Register*, November 2, 1850, 175.

⁸⁰ “Brown’s Original Panorama of American Slavery,” *The Newcastle Courant* (Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England), Friday, October 25, 1850, 1.

⁸¹ Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown’s Original Panoramic Views*, 4.

representation, Brown modeled his panorama on perceived audience expectations, and, as a result, omitted elements of slavery that some viewers perceived to be dubious.

Scenes in Brown's panorama could be understood to be truthful without sacrificing drama or emotion. Wells Brown wrote that he included in the panorama "many touching incidents in the lives of Slaves."⁸² This passage in the preface demonstrates Brown's desire to include affective images in his panorama. Brown specifically chose scenes that he imagined to evoke strong emotional responses in viewers. Tapping into multiple registers of emotion marked one way to "hasten the downfall [sic]" of slavery by tipping public sentiment in favor of the anti-slavery cause. In addition to altering public sentiment in favor of abolitionism, an emotional appeal to viewers would, with any luck, prompt a monetary donation to the cause. If the descriptions in the accompanying booklet accurately described scenes from the panorama, Brown's panorama did not lack emotionally charged images. Between scenes of enslaved women being whipped, children being sold from their families, the capture of escaped slaves, a slave funeral, and the enslavement of white children, Brown offered viewers of his panorama a broad spectrum of emotional provocations.

The first half of the Brown's panorama presented the contextual and historical arc of slavery in the United States. The panoramic performance began with a view of Virginia in 1620. Described to readers as "Slavery in its mildest form," the booklet assigned some blame to the British since the British imported slaves to its Virginian colony. Thus, from the very first scene, Brown implicated the British in North American slavery. The next ten slides presented viewers with information with which many were familiar: slaves heading to market, the separation of enslaved mothers from their children, the sale of black people in Washington D.C. and New Orleans, the picking of cotton on a plantation, the harvesting of sugar cane, and the whippings

⁸² Ibid., 2.

endured by enslaved women. Brown's descriptions of these views make plain the multiple registers of suffering, difficulty, and violence that accompanied slavery. Of a view of a cotton plantation, Brown's pamphlet told readers that "'picking season,' as it is called, is the hardest time for slaves on a cotton plantation... the slaves are usually worked, during this season of year, from fourteen to sixteen hours out of the twenty-four."⁸³ Brown pointed out that men and women were expected to pick eighty and seventy pounds a day, "but they [slave drivers] often work them far above this task."⁸⁴ Failure to accomplish the weight resulted in "five cuts with the cat-o'-nine-tails...for every pound of cotton that is wanting."⁸⁵ To reinforce his point, Brown's scene showed viewers "a woman being whipped at the whipping-post, near which are the scales for weighing cotton."⁸⁶ In the following scene of a sugar plantation, Brown eschews the romantic language used in Banvard's pamphlet and instead shows the cane-cutting and sugar-boiling season which he terms "the hardest period of the year on a sugar plantation."⁸⁷ The rigor of the work and threat of violence became apparent "[i]n the foreground of the view [where there] are slaves at work cutting the sugarcane" under the surveillance of a black slave driver with a whip.⁸⁸ The placement of enslaved people laboring during the most demanding period of the year in the foreground of the view literally and metaphorically forefronted the brutalities of slavery in Brown's moving panorama. Brown underscored the veracity of his testimony by reproducing several advertisements for slave auctions in the panorama booklet. Brown had also participated in or witnessed many of these scenes. When he had been hired out to James Walker, he accompanied slaves to the slave market in New Orleans and watched sales of human flesh made on the auction block. From memory, he recalled two "white" girls being sold for \$1500 and

⁸³ Ibid., 18.

⁸⁴ Ibid.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid., 19.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

\$2000 on a New Orleans slave block.⁸⁹ Brown's reference to the sex trade these girls had been sold in to – "[f]or what purpose such high sums were given all those who were acquainted with the iniquities of American Slavery will readily suspect" – echoed the subject of "white slaves" present in three views spread through his panorama.⁹⁰

Brown invited viewers to experience a broad spectrum of emotion by displaying a great variety of subject matter in his panorama. In the second scene, the booklet detailed an "[enslaved] woman who will not go on" after her child is stripped from her, and as punishment, white slave agents "are now whipping her to make her proceed without it."⁹¹ In the seventh scene, enslaved men and women wearing iron collars labor in a New Orleans chain gang. Brown recalled: "I have myself seen, at one time, three free coloured men in the Calaboose [prison] in New Orleans; one of whom could not prove his freedom, and was afterwards sold and carried to a cotton plantation."⁹² Brown decided that the eleventh scene depicting a slave funeral at night by torchlight "need[ed] little or no explanation."⁹³ According to the booklet, only masters residing in "the better portions of Virginia, Kentucky, and Maryland" allowed deceased slaves to be buried during the day, presumably because such a ritual would detract from the productivity afforded by daylight. The text describing these three scenes – of a mother's whipping, the chain gang composed of formerly free African Americans, and a funeral by torchlight – encouraged viewers of the panorama to experience such emotions as anger, loathing, anguish, grief, compassion, and repugnance. The last half of the scenes in the panorama represented a narrower spectrum of subject matter; all twelve represented the effects or process of escaping from slavery.

As the panorama progressed, viewers witnessed harrowing scenes of slaves fleeing on horseback,

⁸⁹ Ibid., 17.

⁹⁰ The "white" slave appealed to white fears that they too might be enslaved. See Mary Niall Mitchell, "'Rosebloom and Pure White,' or so It Seemed," *American Quarterly* 54, no.3 (September 2002): 369-410.

⁹¹ Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown's Original Panoramic Views*, 7.

⁹² Ibid., 14.

⁹³ Ibid., 19.

escaping from a burning boat, fighting white slave catchers, and crossing the Niagara River to reach Canada. The intensified drama of escape, pursuit, and capture focused the attention and importance of the panorama on experiences of enslaved people. They depicted the precarious and dangerous decisions made by black men and women to free themselves.

Before he toured England, Ireland, and Scotland with his panorama, Brown printed two editions of his *Narrative* in London. Like the many African American abolitionists lecturing throughout the British Isles during the 1840s and early 1850s including Henry Box Brown, Wells Brown sold his tale of escaping from slavery as a means of promoting the antislavery cause and raising money to support his antislavery activism.⁹⁴ These editions included three full-page images interspersed throughout the *Narrative* that depicted traumatic events in Brown's life that had not been featured in the 1847 Boston edition. It is possible that Brown sourced these three images as inspiration for several scenes depicting events in his life for his panorama. If representative of the scenes depicted in his panorama, they present a glimpse into the themes, subject matter, and artistic style conveyed in the panorama. They provide a glimmer into the visual tropes wielded to convince the viewers of the inhumanities of slavery, "disseminate truth upon this subject, and hasten the downfall [sic]" of slavery.

⁹⁴ Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*, 25-41 and 106-110.



Figure 3-1. “The author caught...” in William Wells Brown’s *Narrative of William W. Brown* (Boston: The Anti-Slavery Office, 1848), 1.

The first image depicting a scene from the William Wells Brown’s life greeted viewers opposite the first page of the main text of the *Narrative* (see Figure 3-1). The image closely matched the description of the panorama’s twelfth scene in which Brown escaped from slave catchers’ dogs by taking refuge in a tree before being captured and reenslaved. Escaping the violence that would be inflicted when it became clear that the slave catchers’ dogs would surround him, he ascended the tree “knowing that all possibility of escape was out of the question.”⁹⁵ Scholar Michael Chaney notes that Brown’s position in the tree recalled the image of the supplicant slave made popular by Josiah Wedgwood in the late eighteenth century.⁹⁶ The symbols of a kneeling slave, slave catchers’ dogs, and the slave catcher riding on horseback tapped into decades of abolitionist imagery. For viewers who had seen images with these iconic

⁹⁵ Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown’s Original Panoramic Views*, 20.

⁹⁶ Michael Chaney, *Fugitive Vision*, 132.

figures before, the scene could be simultaneously familiar and unique; the ideas of the image may have been recognizable, yet Brown explained that the scene depicted a deeply personal and traumatic moment of his life. For those viewers unaware of the use of slavecatchers' dogs, the panorama booklet featured seven reprinted newspaper testimonies, with citations signifying their authenticity and believability, that detailed the use of dogs to track and recapture enslaved people. On multiple registers, Brown's panorama educated both its knowing and unknowing audiences of enslaved life for the purpose of accelerating its demise.



Figure 3-2. "The slave-trader Walker..." in William Wells Brown's *Narrative of William W. Brown* (Boston: The Anti-Slavery Office, 1848), 48.

The second image depicting a scene in Brown's life showed him escorting a large number of enslaved men and women to the slave markets of New Orleans with his employer, James Walker (see Figure 3-2). While no one scene in the panorama depicts Walker, Brown, and a

group of slaves being led to New Orleans, gangs of soon-to-be-sold slaves presided over by authority figures appear in two scenes throughout the panorama. In one scene, agents of the infamous slave traders Franklin & Armfield lead a group of slaves to Washington D.C. to be sold. The following scene featured the same group of slaves “chained and driven past the [Nation’s] Capitol.”⁹⁷ The booklet instructed the viewers to contemplate the “hypocrisy, or gross inconsistency” of politicians “making speeches and passing resolutions in favour of Republicanism in France” while supporting slavery in the United States.⁹⁸ The reference to French Republicanism marked another instance of hailing a particular audience knowledgeable of the contemporaneous celebrations of the emergence of the Second Republic in France. Brown encouraged his readers to locate a gross hypocrisy of championing democratic Republicanism abroad while severely limiting it in the United States. The choice to locate the scene in front of the United States Capitol is telling. Few places could visually and metaphorically expose the insincerity of republican ideals. The panorama scene subverted of the iconographic symbol of liberty and justice into one stained with the inequality and hypocrisy.

If the groups of enslaved people resembled those in the image of James Walker on horseback published in the *Narrative*, they depicted decently attired men and women. An image of contrasts, the woodcut presented enslaved people in crisp lightly-colored shirts, vests, and dresses. The knapsacks they carried would have been familiar to any viewer who had seen one of the thousands of stereotyped images of an escaped slave with a knapsack tied on a stick that had been slung over his shoulder. The knapsacks, women’s headwraps, bare feet, and manacled hands visually marked these people as slaves. Sitting atop a horse, the authoritative Walker looked down at the people he led south to be sold. The dog by Walker’s side signaled the threat

⁹⁷ Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown’s Original Panoramic Views*, 8.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 8-9.

of violence and one of the mechanisms of control wielded against enslaved people. In fact, each of the three full-page images featured in Brown's *Narrative* depicted slavecatchers, their dogs and horses, and Brown. The positioning of Brown behind the enslaved multitude and away from Walker and the dog visually distanced Brown from the authority of the slave trader, though his position on a horse reveals his forced participation in transporting the group of enslaved people. Located in the distance, Brown is rendered smaller than Walker and located among the enslaved people who occupy the left half of image. This positioning conveyed Brown's lesser role in the trafficking of slaves; visual cues related to positioning underscored Walker's violent power and minimized Brown's responsibility for the tragic task.

The nineteenth view of Brown's panorama resembled a woodcut image of Brown and his mother's recapture featured in his autobiographical *Narrative* (see Figure 3-3). In the booklet that accompanied the panorama, Brown wrote that this view "shows that a fugitive slave has no security whatever that he will not be returned to his owner, until he shall succeed in escaping to Canada, or some other territory over which the United States Government has no control."⁹⁹ The panorama booklet then gave the page number where a reader could find another description of the recapture and suggested that the reader reference it. In the woodcut image, as Brown resisted one slavecatcher's attempt to enslave him, he stumbled backward as a second slavecatcher grasped his wrist in one hand and a rope, presumably to bind his hands together, in the other. The iconic knapsack that denoted Brown and his mother's status as escaped slaves resting on the ground between them, Brown's mother looked on, immobile. Following five scenes of people escaping from slavery, this scene of the panorama reminded viewers of the sobering reality of slave recapture. The violence symbolized by the slavecatchers' dog kept visible the uncivilized depths to which men had sunk to perpetuate the institution of slavery.

⁹⁹ Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown's Original Panoramic Views*, 32.

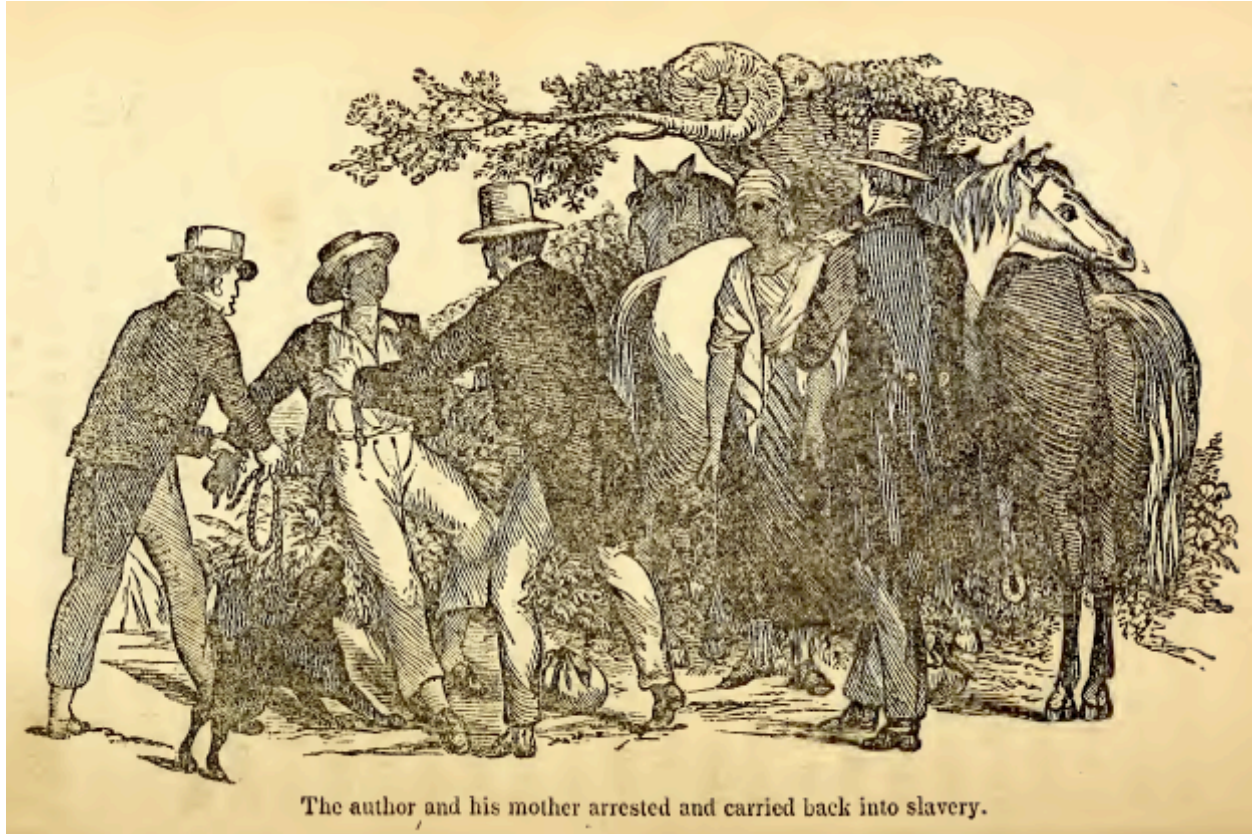


Figure 3-3. “The author and his mother...” in William Wells Brown’s *Narrative of William W. Brown* (Boston: The Anti-Slavery Office, 1848), 72.

The narrative arc of the second half of the panorama focused on the processes of escape and recapture. Five consecutive scenes celebrated group and individual escapes from slavery. Though many of these were daring, dangerous, and sometimes innovative – they included defending one’s family from wolves, escaping a burning boat, and cross-dressing as disguise – they depicted flight from bondage and the hope of freedom. One attendee, writing that “the object has been to show the hardships of the slave, and the sufferings to which he is willing to submit, in order to gain freedom,” accurately pinpointed the design of the second half of the panorama.¹⁰⁰ The view of Brown and his mother’s arrest ended a series of escape and resituated the viewer to contemplate the often-experienced dangers of slavery once again. Lest viewers

¹⁰⁰ “General Intelligence,” *Christian Register*, November 2, 1850, 175.

believe that an escape into another state guaranteed freedom, William Wells Brown transported the reader through various scenes located in Northern states that endangered the provisional freedom of fugitive slaves. In a few of the panorama's final scenes, Brown exhibited views of a group of fugitive slaves living in Buffalo who banded together to liberate a family of escaped slaves after they "had been seized and dragged from their home at dead of night" by slavecatchers.¹⁰¹ High drama ensued as the band of fugitive slaves initially retook the "brother Fugitive and his family" but were soon surrounded by white canal workers and a sheriff attempting to reenslave them.¹⁰² The panorama scene displayed the "terrible conflict" between the two groups with the group of fugitive slaves emerging victorious. The defiance of the fugitive slaves who placed their own freedom in jeopardy while assisting the captured fugitive family demonstrated the precarious notion of freedom and the lengths to which fugitive people fought to fulfill it. As an escaped slave who sought refuge in Massachusetts and then as an escaped slave exiled in the British Isles after the passage of the 1850 Fugitive Slave Act, William Wells Brown knew well the precarious and unstable realities of being a fugitive.

Immediately following the conflict scene, William Wells Brown sought to reinforce a deep connection between his viewers and the enslaved people of the United States in the triumphant last scene of Brown's panorama. The last scene of the panorama – entitled "The Fugitive's home – A Welcome to the Slave – True Freedom" – displayed the narrative culmination of the preceding two views in which a group of black Buffalo, New York residents free a family of slaves from slave catchers and usher them to safety in Canada after being surrounded and attacked by their pursuers. The tense scenes underscored the tenuous and temporary freedom of escaped slaves living in the United States. Brown envisioned Canada, in

¹⁰¹ Brown, *A Description of William Wells Brown's Original Panoramic Views*, 35.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

comparison, Canada, to provide a safe and “true freedom” for fugitive enslaved people. The text that accompanied the final view in the panorama booklet encouraged viewers to imagine themselves as eyewitnesses to each of the proceeding scenes. The description read:

You have now accompanied the fugitive, amidst perils by land and perils by water, from his dreary bondage in the Republican Egypt of the United States to the River Niagara. *You must now imagine yourselves as having crossed that river, and as standing, with the Slave, upon the soil over which the mild scepter of Queen Victoria extends; that sceptre not more the emblem of regal authority than of freedom and protection to the persecuted Slave.*¹⁰³

Brown explicitly encouraged the readers of his booklet to imagine themselves as having participated in the narrative. In doing so, he called on his audience to participate vicariously in the scene of freedom unfolding before them. Brown further encouraged the audience members’ vicarious experience of the panorama by describing “[a] white man – an Englishman – [who] is extending his hand to his coloured friends, giving them, at the time, the comforting assurance that, on British soil, they are safe from the ‘hunters of men.’”¹⁰⁴ The description marked an overt appeal to the majority white audiences that attended Brown’s panorama. The appeal encouraged audience members to see elements of themselves in the figures giving aid to the African descended people shown in the panorama. Brown beseeched his audience members directly: “O Britons!... Still let it be the privilege of your countryman, in whatever country or clime he raises his voice, to assert the dignity and rights of humanity...”¹⁰⁵ His appeal entreated his audience members to advocate for the end of slavery and created a direct link between the British people and the enslaved people in the United States.

William Wells Brown sought to capitalize on his panorama’s link between his British audiences and the antislavery advocates of the United States. In language that echoed the description of the last scene of the panorama, Brown wrote: “If any, touched by contemplating

¹⁰³ Ibid., 37. Emphasis mine.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid., 38.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

the wrongs of the American Slave, should feel a desire to hold out to him a helping hand, they may be assured that opportunity is not wanting.”¹⁰⁶ He proceeded to describe abolitionist societies in Boston, Massachusetts and their collaborative, annual Anti-Slavery Bazaar. Beseeching his audience members donate goods to be sold at the Bazaar and money, Brown stated that the monies raised would fund antislavery lectures, public meetings, and publications. He provided a list of women in twenty-eight cities spread across England, Ireland, and Scotland who had volunteered to collect funds for the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society, its annual Anti-Slavery Bazaar, and the American Anti-Slavery Society. If sufficiently compelled, viewers of the panorama could send money to any of these women with the promise that it would be used to aid in the downfall of the peculiar institution.

When exhibiting his panorama, Brown promoted various strategies to convince attendees of the necessity to contribute to the dissolution of slavery via donations and by intensifying antislavery sentiments. Brown forthrightly affirmed the authenticity and veracity of his panorama when he announced in advertisements and his panorama booklet that he had been formerly enslaved and that his exhibition accurately reflected the realities of enslavement in the United States. Furthermore, Brown’s utilized the strategy of inviting audience members to experience vicariously the displayed events of the panorama. Instead of merely a visual display marked by rigidly defined lines being observer and that which was observed, Brown encouraged his audience members to participate in the certain scenes he exhibited and, after the exhibition ended, participate in antislavery fundraising. Conceived as a direct refutation to the visualization of slavery in a popular panorama, Brown’s project subverted commonly circulated narratives of enslavement that downplayed the violence of slavery and the massive attempts made by enslaved people to free themselves. Brown subsequently countered the stereotype of the romanticized

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 39.

version of slavery in the United States. Like Box Brown, Wells Brown emphasized the brutalities of slavery and the willpower of enslaved people to emancipate themselves. In doing so, Brown refocused the panorama to emphasize the experiences of enslaved African Americans and centered them as the narrative focus of his panorama. This explains the panorama's repeated and detailed descriptions of enslaved people's attempts to find freedom. As such, his moving panorama greatly deviated from the landscape genre medium upon which it was based. Brown negotiated *what* his audiences saw, instructed them on *how* they should see it, and directed them to take action to *change* it.

FEIGNING OBJECTIVITY IN JAMES PRESLEY BALL'S
SPLENDID MAMMOTH PICTORIAL TOUR OF THE UNITED STATES

Only a few years after William Wells Brown and Henry Box Brown began exhibiting their panoramas depicting slavery in the United States, another African American man named James Presley Ball exhibited a panorama that took its viewers on a visual tour that began in Africa, focused predominantly on the United States, and ended in Canada. Compared to the black abolitionists' panoramas before his, Ball's panorama most explicitly warned of the "retrograded" and deteriorating condition of the United States due to the existence of slavery. Ball's panorama featured more views than both William Wells Brown and Henry Box Brown's panoramas – both those focused on scenery and those studying the conditions of the enslaved – which allowed for Ball's repeated juxtaposition of scenic landscapes and the inhumanities perpetuated throughout them. Though less particular than Henry Box Brown's desire to free his wife and children from slavery, Ball's panorama conveyed the message that the enslaved must

go free lest the nation-state continue to decay until a violent upheaval would destroy the country and leave it a “shapeless mass of wreck and rubbish.”¹⁰⁷

Like William Wells Brown and Henry Box Brown before him, Ball had an established reputation and a recognized name before touring his panorama. Born free in June 1825 in Virginia, Ball learned the process of daguerreotypy from another free black man, John B. Bailey, while in Sulphur Springs, West Virginia in 1845. The Bostonian taught the young Ball skills that he would take with him back to Cincinnati. Carving out a life as a daguerreotypist then proved difficult; in three month’s time, Ball created two pictures: one for cash, the other on time. Thinking that life as a photographer would prove successful elsewhere and having waited until the worst of the winter weather passed, Ball set out for Pittsburgh in the spring of 1846 and proceeded to Richmond soon thereafter. He worked in a hotel dining room until he had saved enough money to rent a room near the State Capitol where his luck changed. “Virginians rushed in crowds to his room; all classes, black and white, bond and free” yet Ball returned to and travelled throughout Ohio for two years before settling in Cincinnati in 1849.¹⁰⁸ His profits steadily mounted, and on January 1, 1851, Ball opened another Cincinnati gallery to display and create daguerreotypes.

News spread far and wide of J.P. Ball’s skill and spectacular success. On December 26, 1853, Samuel Ringgold Ward, an escaped slave, gave a speech to the Cheltenham Literary and Philosophical Institution in Cheltenham, England, in which he proclaimed Ball to be the best daguerreotypist in Ohio.¹⁰⁹ In April 1854, the full page that *Gleason’s Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion* dedicated to Ball’s growing enterprise further increased the visibility and reputation

¹⁰⁷ James Presley Ball, *Ball’s Splendid Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States* (Cincinnati: Achilles Pugh, 1855), 56.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 8.

¹⁰⁹ “Origins, History, and Hopes of the Negro Race,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, January 27, 1854.

of Ball's skills as a daguerreotypist. Half of the page displayed a highly detailed view of the gallery space – replete with a piano forte, Greek statuary, rich window drapery, ornate carpet, fine furniture, dozens of mounted paintings and daguerreotypes, and more than a dozen finely attired men, women and children – in Ball's three-floor studio. The half-page article that accompanied the printed image provided considerable information detailing the trajectory of Ball's career. Though "his early struggles were many and great," the article reported, "his love for art and firmness of character overcame every obstacle to his advancement."¹¹⁰ The writer gushed: [Ball] is the very essence of politeness – nor are his brother less tinctured with this sweet spirit of human excellence and a disposition to please every one who patronizes them."¹¹¹ This demeanor, the article continued, coupled with "the best materials, "the finest instruments," and the ability to create a daguerreotype "with an accuracy and a softness of expression unsurpassed by any establishment in the Union" resulted in the widespread fame that Ball enjoyed.¹¹² Later that month, *Frederick Douglass' Paper* identified Ball's Gallery as "one of the most creditable indications of [African American] enterprise" in Cincinnati which stood as "one of the best answers to the charge of natural inferiority we have lately met with."¹¹³ In May 1854, *Frederick Douglass' Paper* further amplified Ball's fame by reprinting on its front page the image of Ball's gallery and a portion of the descriptive text featured in *Gleason's Pictorial* the previous month.¹¹⁴ In June 1854, the Toronto, Canada based *Provincial Freeman* also reproduced the text for its readers.¹¹⁵

When several Boston periodicals received word that Ball would be exhibiting a panorama, they built anticipation for the coming show. "Mr. J.P. Ball of Cincinnati is in this city, making

¹¹⁰ "Daguerrian Gallery of the West," *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room* (Boston, MA), April 1, 1854, 208.

¹¹¹ Ibid.

¹¹² Ibid.

¹¹³ "The Colored People of Cincinnati," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, April 28, 1854, 2.

¹¹⁴ "Daguerrian Gallery of the West," *Frederick Douglass' Paper*, May 5, 1854, 1.

¹¹⁵ "Daguerrian Gallery of the West," *Provincial Freeman*, June 3, 1854.

arrangements for the production and exhibition of a new panorama upon a national subject” reported the *Boston Evening Transcript*.¹¹⁶ They anticipated that the panorama would “be ready for display in December next and will doubtless prove a very attractive and popular exhibition.”¹¹⁷ The *Daily Atlas* provided more details to its readers and wrote enthusiastically about Ball’s future work, noting that Ball “is about getting up a Panorama on a very extensive scale, to illustrate American scenery and, American institutions. This work, we understand, will cover some 35 or 36 thousand square feet. It will represent scenes in different parts of the country, and is designed to be true to nature and to facts.”¹¹⁸ Including the enormous surface area of the work hinted at the newspaper’s appeal to readers eager to observe such a large moving panorama. The *Daily Atlas* further mentioned that Ball was in Boston to take sketches of Boston and the surrounding city before wishing him success in his endeavors.¹¹⁹ *Gleason’s Pictorial*, wrote that Ball’s project-in-development was “a subject particularly interesting to all classes, and which will be exhibited here ere long” and reminded its readers of Ball’s fame and its article published five months earlier.¹²⁰ The reviews of Ball’s panorama later stressed the moving panorama’s accessibility, massive scale, popularity, and refined sensibilities.

Much of what scholars can know about the fifty-three scenes represented in Ball’s panorama emerges from the lengthy booklet that accompanied the panorama. *Ball’s Splendid Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States* explained most of the scenes shown in the panorama and often provided additional information thought to be useful to readers. More specifically, Ball envisioned the accompanying booklet to establish firmly in the minds of its readers the messages communicated in the panorama. As he documented in the booklet’s preface,

¹¹⁶ “New Panorama,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, August 31, 1854, 2.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁸ “Mr. J.P. Ball,” *Daily Atlas* (Boston, MA), August 31, 1854, 2.

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁰ “Personal,” *Gleason’s Pictorial Drawing-Room* (Boston, MA), September 16, 1854, 173.

he penned the booklet “[t]hinking that the lessons sought to be inculcated by Ball’s Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States, could be further enforced by a collection of the facts upon which the picture [panorama] is based.”¹²¹ In recording these “facts,” Ball claimed that he

endeavored to avoid the insertion of any thing that cannot be substantiated as truth. Of the laws and customs of the people, North and South, he has tried to give us an unbiased account, and ‘Nothing extenuate, nor aught set down in malice.’ No literary excellence is claimed; tis but a plain attempt to record plain facts for plain people.¹²²

Ball made clear that he intended his audiences “to be inculcated” with “lessons” when experiencing his panorama. Since these lessons “could be further enforced by a collection of the facts upon which the picture is based,” it stands to reason that the words inscribed in the booklet directly relate to the lessons Ball sought to instill in the viewers of his panorama. Scholar Shelley Jarenski has argued that the didactic qualities of Ball’s panorama marked it appropriation of the form, rather than a disruption of it.”¹²³ This approach, however, does not factor its content or its crucial purpose of the spreading antislavery knowledge into the calculus for the disruption of the panoramic medium. Both are essential elements for understanding how Ball both appropriated and disrupted the prevailing characteristics of the panoramic medium. Like many panorama exhibitors before him, Ball repeatedly claimed the veracity of the panoramic experience and even couched himself as an objective, detached narrator of truth. In a line intended to support his claims of veracity, Ball wrote that the booklet “tis but a plain attempt to record plain facts for plain people.”¹²⁴ Much rested on these claims of veracity, objectivity, and accessibility.

First exhibited in Cincinnati, the city where Ball was best known due to his successful daguerrean galleries, the panorama garnered much acclaim. After being viewed by audiences for several weeks in March 1855, Ball decided to travel to Cleveland with the panorama. Billed as

¹²¹ Ball, *Ball’s Splendid Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States*, 5.

¹²² Ibid.

¹²³ Jarenski, “‘Delighted and Instructed,’” 134.

¹²⁴ Ibid.

“Ball’s Mammoth Panorama of American Scenery,” the advertisements for the panorama primarily detailed the urban and landscape views offered in the exhibition.¹²⁵ Ball appealed to those audiences eager to see a panorama of scenery in the United States. By advertising that the panorama “finished in the highest style of art” had been completed at a cost of more than \$6,000 and covered more than 23,000 square feet of canvas, Ball appealed to those people desiring to witness something impressive, expensive, and expansive.¹²⁶

Like the beginning of Henry Box Brown’s panorama, Ball’s panorama began in Africa. The first three scenes both reified and subverted stereotypical notions of Africa and Africans’ barbarity and primitivism during the middle half of the nineteenth century.¹²⁷ He provided viewers with scenes of a lion hunt, scenery of the Niger River, and the festivities following the lion hunt. Viewers witnessed dancing and banjo-playing Africans, but Ball noted that Africans “are far from being the indolent and ignorant savages that many suppose them to be.”¹²⁸ He provided evidence of this claim by citing the Africans’ large-scale agricultural production, their education of children, studying of the Koran, highly efficient trade networks, and their “considerable advancement in the science of government.”¹²⁹ The next scenes show the disorder caused by European intervention. The “Murderous onslaught of the Slave hunters,” “Natives flying in confusion,” and horrific testimonies of starving slaves as they are forced to march to the ocean and board ships bound for North America conveyed to audiences of the panorama and

¹²⁵ “At the Atheneum,” *Cleveland Leader*, March 26, 1855, 3.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹²⁷ Stuart Hall, “The Spectacle of the ‘Other’,” in *Representation: Cultural Representations and Signifying Practices*, ed. Stuart Hall (London: SAGE Publication, 1997): 5-17; Philip D. Curtin, *The Image of Africa: British Ideas and Action, 1780-1850* (London: Macmillian and Company, 1965); Alta Jablow, *The Africa that Never Was: Four Centuries of British Writing about Africa* (New York: Twayne Publishers, 1970); Leilia Koivunen, *Visualizing Africa in Nineteenth Century British Accounts* (New York: Routledge, 2008).

¹²⁸ Ball, *Ball’s Splendid Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States*, 11.

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*

booklet that Europeans introduced unparalleled chaos, suffering, and death to the African continent.

Ball communicated his belief in the retrograding effects on the industry, culture, and people who support slavery once the panorama's narrative reached the shores of the United States. Charleston, South Carolina marked the first view of North America in the panorama. Ball lampooned the city as once "among the commercial cities of America" but "the withering influence of slavery" regrettably transformed its populace to "fanatic zeal[ots]" who whipped naked women in public, "exhausted [the state's] soil, and [have] been reduced to making merchandize of her sons and daughters."¹³⁰ His description narrated a negative change over the course of time that slavery had wrought on the city and its inhabitants. After showing several scenes of the port of New Orleans and its scenic monuments, Ball turned his audiences' attention to the interior of Bank's Arcade where man casually laughed, smiled, and read the news before commencing in the separation and selling of enslaved families. The evils engendered by slavery had taken root in "one of the most lecherous-looking old brutes I ever set eyes on" as he purchased an enslaved woman.¹³¹ In a reference to sexual violation assuredly not lost on his audience, Ball prayed: "GOD shield the helpless victim of that bad man's power – it may be, ere now, that bad man's – lust!"¹³² The tentacles of slavery, wrote Ball, had no bounds. Furthermore, they grew stronger and more debilitating, both for the enslaved and those who benefitted – in many ways – from its preservation.

As the views of the panorama progressed north into the Mississippi River Delta, Ball drew more attention to the damaging effects of slavery on the enslaved. During the presentation of landscape views of sugar plantations, a cypress swamp, and regal residencies of slaveowners,

¹³⁰ Ibid., 18-19.

¹³¹ Ibid., 28.

¹³² Ibid.

Ball identified – by name – those slaveowners known to be especially vicious. The lands of the Delta, he wrote, are “where tyrants reign king; [and] the Legree’s rule their trembling slaves with a bloody hand.”¹³³ Another view shows “Madame Beaujoie’s residence and Sugar House” and slavery’s “terribly destructive” effects on the “overtasked,” “poor wretches whom the remorseless planter drives to their unrequited toil.”¹³⁴ Ball marshals the cogent evidence of population statistics to prove that the very high death rate of enslaved people in Louisiana underscores the brutal living conditions faced by enslaved people in this region. These conditions result, Ball shows in his panoramic views, in scores of enslaved people taking to surrounding woods by moonlight as dogs set loose by slavemasters chased them. Recounting one particularly ferocious newspaper account of a man who dismembered the body of a recaptured slave and “fed a pack of dogs with the limbs,” Ball hoped to convince his audience of the depths of human depravity that result from the support of slavery.¹³⁵ In contrast, Ball followed the newspaper account with the observation that “[m]any of the fugitives are men of daring fortitude, and defy their pursuers even in death.”¹³⁶

The accolades pertaining to Ball and his panorama continued when the panorama arrived in Boston in April 1855, but they differed significantly from those enjoyed in Cleveland. Newspaper reviewers in Cleveland incited public interest by claiming that “[a]ll the Cincinnati papers, without a single exception are loud in their praises of Ball’s Pictorial Tour of America.”¹³⁷ Pinpointing the qualities that would interest potential attendees in Cleveland, the reviewer noted: “one [newspaper] lauds it for the truthfulness of its sketches, another for the excellence of its execution. The first thinking its views of Northern and Southern cities [are]

¹³³ Ibid., 30.

¹³⁴ Ibid., 31.

¹³⁵ Ibid., 35.

¹³⁶ Ibid.

¹³⁷ “Ball’s Tour of America,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), March 26, 1855, 3.

unsurpassed, the second that its plantation, farm, and river scenes are unequalled.”¹³⁸ While several Bostonian periodicals lauded the landscapes of the moving panorama’s views, they quickly labeled the work as anti-slavery and heralded it as a work completed entirely by black artists. Immediately after mentioning the panorama’s arrival from Ohio, the first article about Ball’s panorama printed in Boston noted that “this picture has been executed by colored men who have lived over twenty years in the South.”¹³⁹ Communicating claims of authenticity, the inclusion of this information also implied that with the experience of living in the South comes the skill to depict it truthfully. Furthermore, to note that the black men had created the panorama alerted those Bostonians who endeavored to patronize black businesses.

The reasons that reviewers gave for attending Ball’s panorama varied widely. While the panoramas “many beauties” prompted some reviewers to urge the public to attend, a recurring reason given for attending the panorama was to support free and enslaved African Americans. One reviewer challenged “every one to see it... especially all such as claim to be friends of the colored race.”¹⁴⁰ Another reviewer remarked that those wishing to “assist in elevating a despised and oppressed race” should attend the panorama. An author writing for the *Liberator* pointed out that the exhibition of Ball’s panorama coincided with the anniversary celebrations of the New England Anti-Slavery Society. As such, the reviewer desired that “all who claim to take an interest in the development of genius, talent and moral worth, on the part of free colored persons” would attend the panorama.¹⁴¹ The seventeen-year-old Charlotte Forten who was visiting from Salem, Massachusetts, attended both the Society’s annual event and Ball’s

¹³⁸ Ibid.

¹³⁹ “New Panorama,” *Boston Evening Transcript*, April 24, 1855, 2.

¹⁴⁰ “Ball’s Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States,” *Liberator*, May 4, 1855, 71.

¹⁴¹ “Ball’s Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States,” *Liberator*, May 25, 1855, 83.

panorama, the latter of which she “liked very much.”¹⁴² Her decision to attend the panorama rewarded her with the opportunity to see Charles Lenox Remond, a renowned black abolitionist and fellow resident of Salem, who was advertised to be the panorama’s “delineator.”¹⁴³ Only one Boston review of Ball’s panorama describes Remond’s role as delineator in which position he “skillfully explained” the views in Ball’s panorama. It is unclear for what duration, or to what extent, Remond acted as the delineator of the panorama, but it is certain that he played a role in articulating the scenes of Ball’s panorama. Ball had presented a petition “for leave to exhibit” his panorama in Boston’s Amory Hall so it is likely that both Ball and Remond shared the role as delineator.¹⁴⁴

The violent views in Ball’s moving panorama proved especially provocative and persuasive among audiences. “If any of our citizen’s [sic] are contemplating a trip to the sunny South,” wrote one reviewer, “they had [better] remain at home and save their money.”¹⁴⁵ Describing the panorama as a “splendid work of *art*” that cost “but slight expensive” to attend, the panorama’s views either supplanted the actual experience of journey to the South, thus making a physical journey moot or provided such an accurate depiction of the realities of slavery in the South that a physical journey no longer seemed alluring.¹⁴⁶ After all, another reviewer attested that “[t]he tableaux representing a pack of negro dogs seizing runaways, on Ball’s great Anti-Slavery Panorama, is of itself sufficient to crown the [Cleveland] Atheneum.”¹⁴⁷ Yet another reviewer wrote that the plantation scenes that detailed the suffering of enslaved people

¹⁴² Ray Allen Billington, ed., *The Journal of Charlotte L. Forten* (New York: Dryden Press, 1953), 61 as cited in Deborah Willis, ed., *J.P. Ball: Daguerrean and Studio Photographer* (New York: Garland Press, 1993), xvi.

¹⁴³ “The New Panorama,” *Daily Atlas* (Boston, MA), April 28, 1855, 2.

¹⁴⁴ “Petitions Presented and Referred,” *Boston Traveler*, May 8, 1855, 4.

¹⁴⁵ “Ball’s Tour of America,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), March 30, 1855, 3

¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷ “The tableaux,” *Cleveland Leader*, April 3, 1855, 3.

“should be seen by all.”¹⁴⁸ The compelling depictions of the brutalities of slavery provoked these reviewers to advertise publically that which they believed the public should see and learn for themselves. That the public should have attended Ball’s panorama to see these scenes of subjection at the prompting of reporters underscored the idea that the scenes of slavery proved to be even more forceful than the panoramic views in the exhibition.

Interspersed between urban and riparian views of Mississippi, Missouri, Kentucky, and Ohio, Ball educated his viewers of the various crops that enslaved people produced. Campaigns initiated by several antislavery societies simultaneous to the exhibition of Ball’s panorama endeavored to weaken the industries that utilized enslaved labor and morally cleanse participants from supporting the institution of slavery.¹⁴⁹ Scenes of sugar, cotton, tobacco, and corn cultivation and richly detailed explanations of the images greeted readers of the pamphlet. Ball advanced the argument that the vast agricultural fertility of the lands along the Mississippi River owed itself to slavery. These scenes served to educate viewers about the immense agricultural production by enslaved people. In part showing that slaves were responsible for an enormous portion of the Southern economy, and in part showing the crushing conditions under which the enslaved lived, Ball advanced the visual and textual argument that the economic success of the United States had been achieved by enslaved labor. That Ball described his view of enslaved people working in a tobacco field and drying house as “giv[ing] a lively idea of the reality”

¹⁴⁸ “The plantation scenes,” *Plain Dealer* (Cleveland, OH), April 3, 1855, 3

¹⁴⁹ Campaigns in Europe and North America to boycott products manufactured or harvested by enslaved labor existed long before Ball’s 1855 panorama. See: Lawrence Glickman, “‘Buy for Sake of the Slave’: Abolitionism and the Origins of American Consumer Activism,” *American Quarterly* 56, no. 4 (December 2004): 889-912; Carol Faulkner, “The Root of the Evil: Free Produce and Radical Antislavery, 1820-1860,” *Journal of the Early Republic* 27, no.3 (Fall 2007): 377-405; Blackett, *Building an Antislavery Wall*, 119-121; Seymour Drescher, “Women’s Mobilization in the Era of Slave Emancipation: Some Anglo-French Comparisons,” in *Women’s Rights and Transatlantic Antislavery in the Era of Emancipation*, eds. Kathryn Kish Sklar and James Brewer Stewart (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2007), 98-121.

underscored his strategy to encourage viewers to believe that his panorama depicted the realities of enslavement.

For some attendees, experiencing Ball's panorama was not merely an artistic or educational exercise to be studied from a distance, but rather, an immersive event that suspended reality. One reviewer detailed the sensation of "glid[ing] along insensibly with the picture from the cities, rivers and plantations of the 'Sunny South,' to the rivers and cities of the rough but free North."¹⁵⁰ The choice of the word "insensibly" – meaning "imperceptibly" or "unconsciously"¹⁵¹ – hinted that the moving panorama so captivated this attendee that it suspended reality as it transported the viewer along its geographical journey. One scene unconsciously flowed into the next. In keeping with scholar Angela Miller's analysis of moving panoramas as presenting "passage through time and history by means of a movement through space,"¹⁵² this attendee of Ball's panorama experienced the fluid connection between Ball's depictions of topography and enslavement. Since Ball proposed that the institution of slavery endangered the nation and prompted the degeneration of its people, Ball would have counted this viewer's experience as a successful realization of his exhibition.¹⁵³ The reviewer continued by praising Ball's panorama for being "all that is claimed for it, and more... no one should fail to visit it."¹⁵⁴ For those readers desiring a similar suspension of reality, an experience of becoming immersed in an engaging narrative, Ball's panorama awaited them.

Ball argued that the toxicity of slavery and racism extended beyond the South and poisoned all areas of the country. In describing a view of the Western city of Cincinnati, Ball wrote of "a period in the history of the city from 1835 to 1844, that scarcely a year passed that

¹⁵⁰ "Ball's Pictorial Tour," *Cleveland Leader*, March 31, 1855, 3.

¹⁵¹ "insensibly, adv." OED Online. June 2013. Oxford University Press. Last Accessed June 8, 2013. <<http://www.oed.com.proxy.lib.umich.edu/view/Entry/96747>>.

¹⁵² Angela Miller, "The Panorama, the Cinema, and the Emergence of the Spectacular," 41.

¹⁵³ Ibid.

¹⁵⁴ "Ball's Pictorial Tour," *Cleveland Leader*, March 31, 1855, 3.

was not disgraced by mobs, against the anti-slavery whites, and colored people.”¹⁵⁵ He described the demolition of abolitionist printing presses, the destruction of property, and violence suffered by its citizens with “the wild mob spirit being at times so general and strong, as to defy law and hold possession of the city for several days in succession.”¹⁵⁶ Yet, the outspoken critics of slavery and racism prevailed. “[T]he right of free speech triumphed” because “[a]s fast as one press was destroyed, they set up another, when driven from one office they secured another.”¹⁵⁷ He further mentioned that black men owned and controlled manufacturing in the city and the successful repealing of the state’s restrictive Black Laws.

Moving east from Cincinnati, the panorama and its accompanying booklet evidenced the long shadow of the Fugitive Slave Law darkening those states that had abolished slavery. Here, Ball employs visual culture to critique further the politics of race in the United. Describing the view of Wyoming Valley in Eastern Pennsylvania as “beautiful,” Ball warned that “the valley seemed fated to be the theatre of bloody contests” as he proceeded to list the clashes between Native Americans and colonists, the Whigs and Tories, and most recently, the slave catchers and fugitive slaves.¹⁵⁸ The actions of the slave catchers “whom the Fugitive Slave net had armed with arbitrary power” had “disgraced” the area by attempting to capture and murder one William Thomas.¹⁵⁹ Like the prevailing abolitionists of Cincinnati, Thomas escaped capture and death to find freedom in Canada. Yet prejudice and the legal power of the Fugitive Slave Law prevented anyone from aiding Thomas; according to Ball, “not one hand was lifted to prevent” the violence that Thomas experienced.¹⁶⁰ In response, Ball wrote castigated those in Wyoming Valley specifically and Americans more broadly: “[t]he blood that bred *murderers* in the Revolutionary

¹⁵⁵ Ball, *Ball’s Splendid Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States*, 46.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, 47.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 51.

era, breeds *cowards* in this.”¹⁶¹ Ball argued that the violence wrought by slavery adulterated the natural beauty of the land. The institution of slavery had mutated with the assistance of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 and subsequently sullied the character of the nation’s citizens.

Traveling further east and north to New England, Ball contended that slavery had adulterated the principles of freedom and justice that many of its citizens professed. Passing from the Wyoming Valley en route to Boston, viewers of the panorama witnessed coal miners, the Susquehanna River, woodland scenes, and moonlit seascapes. Ball first praised the “noble” people of Boston who have “continually... pointed the American people to the wrong and danger of slavery.”¹⁶² “But that accursed institution,” testified Ball, “blunted the American conscience,” “sapped its manhood,” and “has had its blasting effect in Boston as elsewhere.”¹⁶³ Despite the best intentions of the “noble” people of Boston, they were legally powerless to the reach of the Fugitive Slave Act, which he writes, “has made Massachusetts slave territory, and the Bostonians have submitted, restively tis true; but still they submitted.”¹⁶⁴ Such a statement elided the reality of black and white Bostonians’ repeated attempts, sometimes successful, to thwart the recapture of escaped slaves present in their city.¹⁶⁵ Ball did, however, correctly point to the destructive force of the Fugitive Slave Act and its nation-wide grasp on the country. Ball maintained that the institution of slavery grew in strength, power, and geographical reach to the detriment of the people of the United States – black and white.

The panorama celebrated the promise that Canada held for fugitive slaves. In the views leading up to the last scene of the panorama, Ball displayed paintings of Niagara Falls.

¹⁶¹ Ibid.

¹⁶² Ibid., 53.

¹⁶³ Ibid.

¹⁶⁴ Ibid.

¹⁶⁵ Perhaps the most famous is Anthony Burns. See Steven Lubet, *Fugitive Justice: Runaways, Rescuers, and Slavery on Trial* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2010); Gordon S. Barker, *The Imperfect Revolution: Anthony Burns and the Landscape of Race in Antebellum America* (Kent, Ohio: Kent State University Press, 2010).

Panoramas depicting the waterfalls at Niagara proved popular among audiences in the middle of the nineteenth century, and Ball no doubt capitalized on the excitement that they generated. The international boundary between the United States and Canada marked by Niagara Falls also assisted in the narrative trajectory of the panorama. Ball could display views of the falls to accommodate the desires of his audiences while also depicting them as a geographical boundary that separated slavery from freedom. In keeping with the theme of geographical movement, Ball pushed past the border of the United States into Canada. He titled the last scene of his panorama “Queenston: Arrival of the Fugitives on British Soil.” Ball identified the city “as a terminus of the Underground Railroad, and as such, finds a place in our picture.”¹⁶⁶ There, Ball stressed the autonomy of those who escaped slavery and successfully trekked into Canada when he wrote that “[t]he fugitives themselves not unfrequently [sic] make their way unaided to Canada, and freedom, and perform deeds that ‘give the world assurance of a man.’”¹⁶⁷

Ball ended the booklet accompanying his panorama with violently foreboding words for the future of the United States. The closing words in the booklet that accompanied Ball’s panorama quoted a portion of Henry Wadsworth Longfellow’s 1842 poem “The Warning.” They read:

There is a poor, blind Sampson in this land,
Shorn of his strength, and bound in bands of steel,
Who may, in some grim revel, raise his hand,
And shake the pillars of our commonweal,
Till the vast temple of our liberties,
A shapeless mass of wreck and rubbish lies.¹⁶⁸

Though the last scene of the panorama depicted the freedom enjoyed in Canada, Ball clearly directed a stern warning to the people of the United States. The violence suffered by enslaved people, Ball seemed to posit, might eventually manifest itself in a destructive toppling of the

¹⁶⁶ Ball, *Ball’s Splendid Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States*, 55.

¹⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 56.

status quo. Ball directed the warning as a possibility not a determined destiny. Enabling the emancipation of enslaved people in the United States before an undisclosed power laid waste to “the vast temple of our liberties” would prevent unnecessary violence. Indeed, the exhibition and touring of the panorama intended to disseminate and strengthen antislavery ideologies among viewers that ultimately, Ball hoped, would prevent the violence described in Longfellow’s poem. The reproduction of the poem presciently anticipated the violence of the Civil War that would soon follow the exhibition of Ball’s *Splendid Mammoth Pictorial Tour of the United States*.

CONCLUSION

With revived interest in the moving panorama in the middle of the nineteenth century, several African American men appropriated the medium to spotlight the injustices of slavery for the purpose of inspiring observers to aid in the downfall of slavery in the United States. They harnessed several strategies to attract audiences to their exhibitions and to persuade audience members that the information they provided about enslavement was authentic and truthful. Two formerly enslaved men, Henry Box Brown and William Wells Brown, rooted their claims of authenticity in their personal experience as enslaved men in the United States. Both Wells Brown and Box Brown sought refuge in the British Isles from the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 that endangered their liberty in the United States while they both engaged in antislavery activism. While both engaged a visual medium partial to topography, Wells Brown and Box Brown privileged the experiences of African Americans in their exhibitions. Wells Brown supplemented the cogent powers of his panorama by advocating that audiences experience select scenes vicariously. He envisioned audience members to participate actively in the narrative of the panorama by imagining themselves as assistants in the cause of antislavery.

Not having been born enslaved, James Presley Ball did not make the same claims of authenticity and veracity stemming from personal experience that Box Brown and Wells Brown used to attract and persuade audiences. Often visually or tangentially marginal to popular moving panoramas, Ball's exhibition, like Box Brown and Wells Brown, elevated the lives of enslaved people to occupy the center stage of his exhibition. More than his two African American predecessors, Brown emphasized the destructive forces of the institution of slavery on the non-enslaved. Like a metastasized cancer, slavery and its detrimental effects spread throughout the country, infecting even hotbeds of antislavery activism like Boston. Ball frequently identified what he believed to be the retrogressive effects of slavery on the people of the United States. Exhibited in Ohio and Massachusetts, two states with extensive and powerful antislavery activism, Ball's panorama invited viewers to contemplate the manifold ways in which their lives connected with the effects wrought by slavery and the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850.

When taken together, these three panoramas catalogue the extent to which African American visual artists countered common representations of African Americans by appropriating a visual medium that allowed them to express their own narratives of slavery and freedom. They marshaled moving panoramas both to convince viewers of the injustices of slavery but also persuade them to act to dismantle the institution that shackled millions of African Americans. Brown, Brown, and Ball appropriated the visual medium of the panorama to help attendees visualize the brutalities of slavery. In doing so, some attendees found themselves unconsciously transported along a journey that educated them about the exploitations of slavery and the picturesque scenery that harbored these activities. Each of the panoramas stressed the urgency to end slavery due to its violence, immorality, and denial of human and legal rights; sometimes for the sake of enslaved people and sometimes for the future of the United States.

Chapter 4

Conflicting Views: Images of African Americans Produced during the Civil War

The woman buried herself deeper beneath the stack of hay in the back of a wagon moving too slowly under the cover of night. Refusing to be sold to a house of ill fame, she had fled from her slaveowner to a Union Army camp near Lexington, Kentucky. Hidden in camp from the man who pursued her by members of the Twenty-Second Wisconsin volunteers, she had avoided detection but freedom remained further away. Still and silent as the two Union soldiers who drove the wagon spoke the password that allowed them through the picket lines and out into the night, she knew what would happen to her if she was discovered and sent back to her slaveowner. The spare set of soldier's clothes that the woman wore could disguise her in the darkness when she emerged from the hay if anybody chanced to see the wagon as it made its way to Ohio. The fear of being discovered during each of the more than one hundred miles to Cincinnati must have been too great to sleep. The three traveled together almost without stopping until they reached the house of the noted abolitionist, Levi Coffin, who was known to usher fugitive slaves to safety. She changed out of her soldier's uniform and into women's wear. Soon thereafter, wearing clothing – a dress, gloves, and veil – that covered her entire body, she traveled to the studio operated by the black photographer James Presley Ball Sr. with the two Union soldiers who aided her flight. Her veil lifted to reveal her brown face, Ball released the camera's shutter.¹

¹ Levi Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, The Reputed President of the Underground Railroad*, Second Edition (Cincinnati: Robert Clarke & Co., 1880), 606-608.

The portrait of the unnamed woman is one of very few images of an African American known to be created by an African American photographer during the Civil War. The dearth of black-produced visual materials stands in stark contrast to the multitude of images depicting African Americans in the pages of popular illustrated newspapers printed during the same era. The desire for news of the Civil War helped drive the remarkable demand for illustrated newspapers. Claiming that they communicated the most authentic information – including images – within their pages, illustrated newspapers used several methods to convince readers of the veracity of their news reports. They labeled escaped slaves “contraband” like they would inanimate objects such as bottles of liquor or boxes of dry goods, these people sought freedom while illustrated newspapers displayed them with visual and lexical tropes common to minstrel performances. The images printed in two of the most popular illustrated newspapers, *Harper’s Weekly* and *Frank Leslie’s Illustrated Newspaper*, catalogued the range of anxieties about and prejudices toward fugitive slaves and their possible futures in the United States as they escaped to Union camps.

The enlistment of African American men in the Union Navy and Army prompted a shift in the visual representations of African Americans during the Civil War. With black soldiers mustering out to the front lines, artists now had the option of rendering uniformed African Americans on the battlefield and in camp. The widespread presence of facial hair in the depictions of African American soldiers within *Harper’s* and *Leslie’s* marked African American soldiers as men. The links between facial hair and characteristics of masculinity such as courage, valor, and fortitude became widespread in images of black Union soldiers as the war progressed.

While hundreds of thousands of *Harper’s* and *Leslie’s* issues found their way to readers eager to learn the latest war developments, a handful of African American artists used cameras to

record images of African Americans during the Civil War. The visual medium with which they worked did not allow for the massive economies of scale that illustrated newspapers utilized. Very few of the images are known to scholars in contrast to the popular images produced during the Civil War by artists – Mathew Brady, Alexander Gardner, Timothy O’Sullivan, and George Barnard, among others – whose images appeared in several other forms of media.² Though the attendant images created by African American photographers remain more limited in number, they too expressed opinions about contraband people and black Union sailors and surgeons. At times they conformed to common photographic practices of depicting Union soldiers and other times they noticeably diverged from the common representations of contraband people. James Presley Ball Sr. and Edward Mitchell Bannister, the two African American photographers whose images are examined in this chapter, shared not only a profession but also support for an exhibition of African American art and industry organized by another black man, Edward M. Thomas of Washington, D.C.

In analyzing the preparation of an exhibition of African American art and industry, this chapter examines the ways in which many African Americans envisioned art to elevate white perceptions of black intellect, improve race relations, and encourage the recognition of black achievement among African American communities. Analysis of the planned, but never fully realized, exhibition shows how the more pressing concerns created by the Civil War, namely black emigration and the violence of war, helped derail the exhibition of African American art and industry. Preparation for the exhibition, as evidenced in several black newspapers, rendered

² The sesquicentennial of the Civil War reignited an interest in the photography of the Civil War and shored up the oeuvres of well-known photographers. See: Robert Wilson, *Mathew Brady: Portraits of a Nation* (New York: Bloomsbury USA, 2013); Jeff L. Rosenheim, *Photography and the American Civil War* (New York: Metropolitan Museum of Art, 2013); Allan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill & Wang, 1989); Allan Trachtenberg, “Albums of War: On Reading Civil War Photographs,” *Representations* No.9, Special Issue (Winter 1985): 1-32; Mary Panzer, *Mathew Brady and the Image of History* (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1997).

visible the networks of black leadership that crisscrossed the country during the Civil War. Furthermore, the planning of the exhibition demonstrated the widespread support for art among African Americans while it hinted at the kinds of revolutionary possibilities that many African American leaders imbued in art. This chapter stresses the point that the modes of production, and who controls that production, determined the parameters of visual cultures of race. Furthermore, the different options available to and decisions made by Brady and other photographers well known by scholars today help explain the preservation, and sometimes mythical value, of Brady and his colleagues.³ Images created by African Americans could subvert widespread representations and their accompanying significations of black people, while at other times, they could document their lives with common visual touchstones. People of all races watched as assumptions and judgments of African Americans played out in the images created during the Civil War. Many viewed their first images of the war in the pages of illustrated newspapers.

MINSTRELSY AND THE ILLUSTRATED NEWS DURING THE CIVIL WAR

Taking their cues from the *Illustrated London News*, editors in the United States established several periodicals that specialized in printing images for the pleasure and enrichment of eager audiences. Fanning out from cities on the Atlantic Seaboard, *Gleason's Pictorial Drawing-Room Companion*, the *Illustrated American News*, *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, and *Harper's Weekly* would come to educate their readers with images of recent news.⁴ Though many were short-lived, other illustrated periodicals such as *Frank Leslie's* and *Harper's Weekly* flourished for many years, especially after technological advances in the late

³ On the mythical elements of historical events and personage which Brady wished to document, see Panzer, *Mathew Brady and the Image of History*.

⁴ For more information on the rapidly increasing number of newspapers before the Civil War, see Scott E. Casper, "Introduction" in *A History of the Book in America, Volume 3, The Industrial Book 1840-1880*, eds. Scott E. Casper, Jeffrey D. Groves, Stephen W. Nissenbaum, and Michael Winship (Chapel Hill: Published in association with the American Antiquarian Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 224-230.

1850s allowed them to lower business costs, share news more quickly, and increase revenues like never before.⁵ Many hundreds of thousands of people studied their pages to learn about the Civil War and other events.⁶ The newspapers' claims of reporting authentic and verified views and news of the Civil War extended to images that they published of African Americans.⁷ The creative license exercised by the team of artists who created each image in these illustrated newspapers frequently attributed to African Americans the derisive appearances and actions of blackface minstrel performers.⁸

Presumptions about racial difference and ridicule of African Americans appeared in the images and performances of blackface minstrelsy that circulated in nineteenth century America (see Figures 4-1 and 4-2). Many scholars have analyzed how minstrel shows parodied and mocked African Americans – free and enslaved – and several have demonstrated how these performances instructed white Americans to view blackness as inherently different from whiteness.⁹ White minstrel performers used burnt cork to blacken their bodies and performed

⁵ John Nerone, "Newspapers and the Public Sphere," in *A History of the Book in America, Volume 3, The Industrial Book (1840-1880)*, eds. Scott E. Casper, Jeffrey D. Groves, Stephen W. Nissenbaum, and Michael Winship (Chapel Hill: Published in association with the American Antiquarian Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 231-238.

⁶ "Publisher's Notice," *Harper's Weekly*, June 15, 1861, 369; "Our Success," *Harper's Weekly*, April 26, 1862, 258; "Our Success," *Harper's Weekly*, May 3, 1862, 274; "Our Success," *Harper's Weekly*, May 10, 1862, 290; "To Advertisers," *Harper's Weekly*, April 16, 1864, 242. See also *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, February 4, 1860, 383 as quoted in Budd Leslie Gambee Jr., *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper, 1855-1860: Artistic and Technical Operations of a Pioneer New Weekly in America*, Ph.D. Dissertation, University of Michigan, 1963. Also, see Joshua Brown, *Beyond the Lines: Pictorial Reporting, Everyday Life, and the Crisis of Gilded Age America* (Berkeley: University of California, 2002), 35-40.

⁷ For truth claims, see: "Harper's Pictorial History of the Great Rebellion in the United States," *Harper's Weekly*, August 23, 1862, 543; "Progress of Victory," *Harper's Weekly*, March 29, 1862, 194; "Domestic Intelligence," *Harper's Weekly*, February 25, 1865, 115; "The Stars and Stripes in South Carolina," *Harper's Weekly*, November 23, 1861, 738; "Flight of the President to Washington," *Harper's Weekly*, March 9, 1861, 151; "The Armada," *Harper's Weekly*, November 16, 1861, 722; "Domestic Intelligence," *Harper's Weekly*, January 30, 1864, 67. "Guiseppe Garibaldi," *Harper's Weekly*, November 17, 1860, 722. "Our War Illustrations," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, July 6, 1861, 113; "The Only Reliable War Illustrations," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 27, 1861, 353-354; "Our Illustrations," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, November 16, 1861, 403; "The Conclusion of Vol. XVII," *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, March 12, 1864, 386.

⁸ Brown, *Beyond the Lines*, 33, 36.

⁹ See W.T. Lhamon, *Jump Jim Crow: Lost Plays, Lyrics, and Street Prose of the First Atlantic Popular Culture* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003); Eric Lott, *Love and Theft: Blackface Minstrelsy and the American Working Class* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1993); W.T. Lhamon, *Raising Cain: Blackface Performance from*

stereotypical assumptions of blackness to primarily white audiences. These performances conveyed a false familiarity with blackness and used exaggerated visual cues to denote racial difference based on stereotypes. Debasing notions of black intelligence, blackface minstrels used

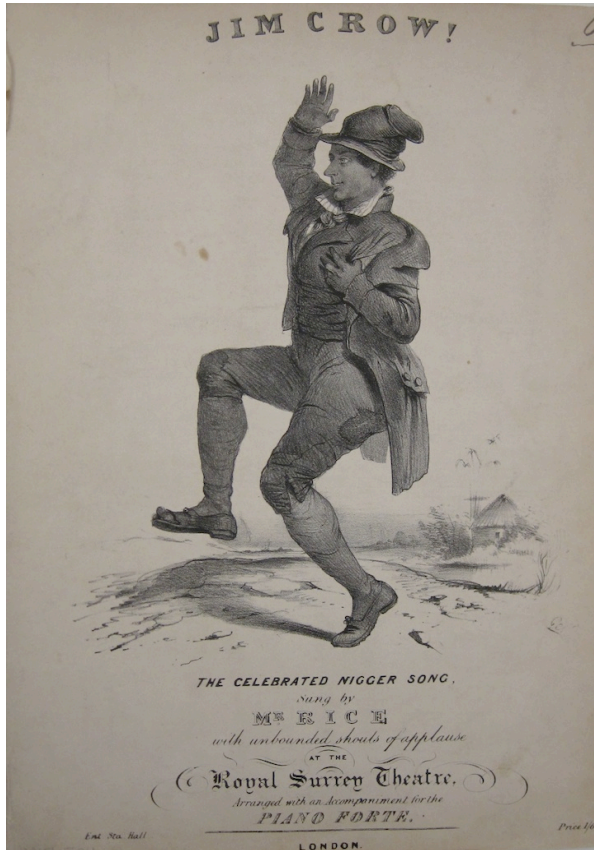


Figure 4-1. “Jim Crow!” sheet music (London: T.E. Purday, 1840) Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Figure 4-2. “Jim Crow.” (London, New York, Philadelphia: Hodgson, 111 Fleet Street & Turner & Fisher; between 1835 and 1845) Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

audible cues, such as a stereotypical black dialect rife with mispronunciations and other mistakes, to signify racial Otherness. Essential to these productions, the singing and dancing of blackface minstrels encouraged audience members to take pleasure in the sights and sounds of alleged black folk music that was often played with bones, a fiddle, and a banjo.

Jim Crow to Hip Hop (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2000); Thomas Holt, “Marking: Race, Race-making, and the Writing of History,” *American Historical Review* 100, no. 1 (February 1995); William J. Mahar, *Behind the Burnt Cork Mask: Early Blackface Minstrelsy and Antebellum American Popular Culture* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1999).

The national circulation of images and performers that derided African Americans provides historical context for the illustrations of African Americans published by *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper* during the Civil War. Indeed, most of the visual markers used to denote black inferiority on stage and in antebellum images – oversized facial features, flamboyant gesticulation, and unkempt physical appearance – could be seen in the images published by the two most popular illustrated newspapers in the United States. These pervasive parallels suggest the influence of blackface minstrelsy and derisive prints on the creation of the images published in *Harper's Weekly* and *Frank Leslie's*. Given the unique historical context of the Civil War, and the prospects for the emancipation of millions of enslaved people, the engravers at these newspapers forged different modes of thinking about blackness. *Harper's* and *Leslie's* blended multiple stereotypes of African Americans to shape the public consciousness of contraband people. These images, along with the text that often accompanied them, instructed viewers in how to read the nature and character of escaped slaves. Providing readers with illustrations that were deemed “authentic” and “accurate,”¹⁰ *Harper's* and *Leslie's* did more than transmit knowledge of what these people allegedly looked like and how they acted; they often reified Americans' assumptions of blackness and produced new knowledge of what being a newly freed slave entailed. Present in illustrated newspapers only

¹⁰ For claims of authenticity and accuracy, see: “Harper's Pictorial History of the Great Rebellion in the United States,” *Harper's Weekly*, August 23, 1862, 543; “Progress of Victory,” *Harper's Weekly*, March 29, 1862, 194; “Domestic Intelligence,” *Harper's Weekly*, February 25, 1865, 115; “The Stars and Stripes in South Carolina,” *Harper's Weekly*, November 23, 1861, 738; “Flight of the President to Washington,” *Harper's Weekly*, March 9, 1861, 151; “The Armada,” *Harper's Weekly*, November 16, 1861, 722; “Domestic Intelligence,” *Harper's Weekly*, January 30, 1864, 67. “Guiseppe Garibaldi,” *Harper's Weekly*, November 17, 1860, 722. “Our War Illustrations,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, July 6, 1861, 113. “The Only Reliable War Illustrations,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, April 27, 1861, 353-354. “Our Illustrations,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, November 16, 1861, 403. “The Conclusion of Vol. XVII.,” *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, March 12, 1864, 386.

weeks after Virginia slaves began to seek refuge in Union camps and continuing long into the Civil War, racial stereotypes – like Jim Crow – jumped from the pages.

The full-page rendering of a contraband dance printed in the January 30, 1864 edition of *Leslie's* highlights the visual connections between blackface minstrelsy and popular depictions of contraband slaves. A group of black musicians play by candlelight in the background (see Figure 4-3). The banjo-strumming musician in the background recalls one of the fundamental characters in a blackface minstrel performance. The figure could conjure up multisensory

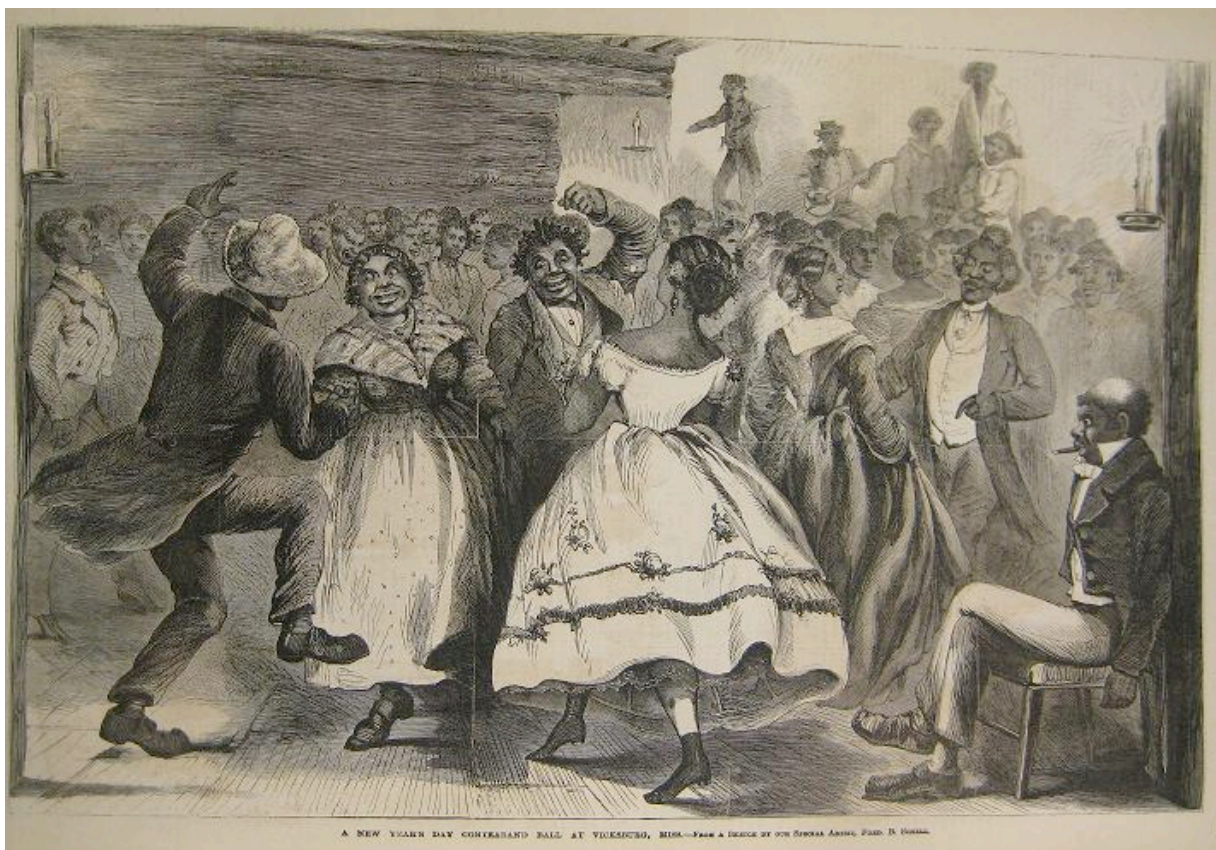


Figure 4-3. *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*. January 30, 1864, 300.
“A New Year’s Day Contraband Ball At Vicksburg.” Courtesy of the William L. Clements Library.

memories and images of minstrel shows that a number of the more than one hundred thousand *Frank Leslie's* readers had personally viewed or attended. Furthermore, the image minimizes the individuality of contraband slaves. The faces of the two prominent contraband people in the

foreground directly facing the viewer have very similar looking faces. They possess almost identical facial structures and expressions: raised eyebrows, wide-eyed stares, full and lightly shaded lips, wide smiles, broad noses, and a similar facial shape. If one's most distinctive physical features include facial features and expressions, then these two people are not shown to be individuals; instead, they are iterations of a racialized stereotype. This suggests the degree to which artists visually designed contraband people as interchangeable, in much the same way that enslaved people were shown to be interchangeable by blackface minstrels that acted out the alleged racial Otherness on stages throughout the country.

The two male figures each holding a hand above their head, especially the figure whose back is turned to the viewer, trace their visual legacy to the Jim Crow stereotype (see Figures 4-1 and 4-2). The images of the Jim Crow stereotype made popular by T.D. Rice stretched back more than three decades before the circulation of *Leslie's* full-page image. Attired in tattered and often patched clothing, the stereotyped figure of Jim Crow lifted one foot into the air while raising one hand above his head. Such a stance visually communicated the movement of a dance that Rice and other minstrels performed on stage to mock African Americans. In a pose that replicates the lifted foot and raised hand of the Jim Crow stereotype, the black figure whose back is turned to the viewer would have been recognizable to Civil War era audiences familiar with the Jim Crow figure. The patch of cloth on his left knee bears the mark of the clothing worn by the images of T.D. Rice as Jim Crow. Due to his identifiable pose and his patched clothing, his obscured face is not required for viewers to recognize his identity as Jim Crow. The stereotypical ideas of blackness disseminated by the images and performances of Rice as Jim Crow informed knowing viewers familiar with the internationally famous figure of Jim Crow.

The clothing worn by the contraband dancers marked an important difference in the representations of escaped slaves while also appropriating the stereotypical depictions of contraband people. The clothing worn by the dancing couple consisting of the man wearing a hat and the woman wearing a capelet visually conformed to the depictions of contraband people printed in *Leslie's* and *Harper's*. The patch that covered a hole or tear in the man's left pant leg at the knee visually hinted to readers of his status as an escaped slave. The man and his partner stand in stark contrast to the contraband couple dancing next to them who wear a fashionable evening dress and a three-piece suit. Artists rarely created images of contraband people to show them wearing anything but the clothes they wore or carried with them as they escaped from slavery.

The elegantly dressed couple, however, presents an example of fashionable middle-class America. Historian Karen Halttunen explains that by the 1860s, fashionable attire was one means by which middle-class Americans sought to distinguish themselves “from the democratic masses by establishing artificial social distinctions.”¹¹ The artificiality of the social distinctions advanced by the contraband couple's stylish attire is perhaps most apparent in this image. Despite the fashionable evening dress – complete with its corseted waist, comparatively ornate floral pattern, and the trim that lined its back – her choice to partake in the merriment with others in the log cabin company marked her as an escaped slave. As Halttunen suggests, clothing did not matter; “what mattered was character” and these individuals, regardless of their attire, were depicted as carefree individuals who conformed to the stereotypically ignorant and simple-minded characters performed by minstrels.¹² That the viewer can see partly up her skirt to see the wire hoop structuring her dress, her naked shoulders and upper back, and her bare lower leg hints at the

¹¹ Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 64.

¹² *Ibid.*, 65.

sexually inappropriate character the woman is assumed to possess. If viewers did not notice, they could certainly follow the wide-eyed gaze of the seated, cigar-smoking man to her right. The image suggested that viewers could or should not be fooled by the attire of some newly escaped slaves since their former status – and all its cultural trappings – as enslaved people could never be dressed up. The illustrators at *Leslie's* made it clear that despite the markers of fashionable middle-class America, contraband people were reducible to a concept of Otherness.

SHADES OF VISIBILITY: THE CONTRABAND WOMAN PHOTOGRAPHED BY JAMES PRESLEY BALL SR.

It was precisely the trappings of fashionable middle-class white womanhood that enabled a contraband woman to travel to Wisconsin after her initial escape from slavery in Kentucky. The tale of her journey from a slaveowner near Nicholasville, Kentucky to a Union Army camp near Cincinnati, Chicago, to Racine, Wisconsin survives because of the recollections of the Quaker activist, Levi Coffin. Though the woman's story may not have been terribly uncommon, photographs of African Americans created by African Americans during the Civil War are exceedingly uncommon. Hundreds, and more likely thousands, of African Americans had their photographs taken during the Civil War.¹³ Yet, the very prolific black Cincinnati photographer, James Presley Ball, is known to have only captured one image of an unnamed contraband woman during the Civil War. Fugitive slaves escaped to Cincinnati with great frequency and the Civil War did not stem their movement. For Ball, photographing contraband people could be incriminating evidence. With the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850 enforced in Ohio, a photograph of an escaped slave might be used as documentary proof that Ball had refused to turn in an escaped slave. Not doing so could result in prosecution and jail time for Ball or any other person

¹³ A thorough range of these images can be seen at the Library of Congress in the Civil War Glass Negatives and Related Prints Collection, the Gladstone Collection, the Liljenquist Family Collection, and the Stereograph Cards Collection.

implicated in the crime. That he captured a photograph of the young African American woman seeking freedom might show his confidence that she would be deemed legally free by the ensuing Emancipation Proclamation, that her story was too remarkable not to record with an image, or that Ball trusted its owner to keep it out of sight. Perhaps it was all three.



Figure 4-4. “Jesse L. Berch, quartermaster sergeant...” J.P. Ball’s Photographic Gallery. September 1862. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

The image depicts two standing white men flanking a seated African American woman (see Figure 4-4). Each of the men holds a revolver in their right hand that is drawn across their chest and pointed to their left. The man standing on the left side of the image is Quartermaster Sergeant Jesse L. Berch of the 25th Wisconsin Regiment. He wears tall boots, baggy pants, a rounded hat, and a thick, heavy coat that reaches his knees. The African American woman, who is seated on a chair completely covered by her clothing, wears a floor-length dress, a shawl drawn across her shoulders, and a veil that rests atop and behind her head. She displays one glove-covered hand on her lap. The man on the right side of the image is Postmaster Frank M. Rockwell of the 22nd Wisconsin Regiment who wears clothing similar to Quartermaster Sergeant Berch. The three figures stand on square-patterned flooring in front of a plain backdrop.¹⁴

The recorded history of the three figures and how they came to be in Cincinnati provides a foundation from which to interpret this image taken in Ball's studio. The young African American woman, approximately eighteen years old, escaped from slavery and journeyed to the Union Army camp near Nicholasville, Kentucky after learning that she would be sold into a house of prostitution in Lexington, Kentucky. Illegally hidden by the white Union soldiers of the Twenty-Second Wisconsin Regiment from her slaveowner who came to the Union camp hunting for her, the woman escaped on a wagon to Cincinnati with two Union chaperones in the dead of night. The three made their way to the house of Levi Coffin since one of the men knew Coffin personally and knew that he assisted formerly enslaved people seeking freedom. The three rested for a day or two at Coffin's home and made their way to J.P. Ball's gallery to have their photograph taken. The soldiers then telegraphed friends in Racine, Wisconsin and arranged for the woman's passage there by train via Chicago. "Presenting the appearance of a white lady," the

¹⁴ This image also appears in Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2012), 91.

African American woman wore a veil that covered her face and took her first- class seat on the train while being escorted by the white Levi Coffin. He and the soldiers bid her goodbye as the train departed, the black woman waving her handkerchief on her way to freedom. What remains of her story is Coffin's testimony and J.P. Ball's image.¹⁵

Ball's composition of the image of the three figures underscores the precarious status of an escaped slave during the Civil War. The two soldiers flank the young woman and appear to stand ready, with guns drawn, to ward off any person attempting to recapture her. The lines created by the men's angled, inward stance and the light-colored outline of the woman's dress form an invisible lines that create an "X" that centers on the woman's head. Like rotated crosshairs of a rifle's scope, the invisible lines marked the formerly enslaved woman as the target of Confederate capture and reenslavement. The drawn guns, especially the one held by Quartermaster Sergeant Berch that is pointed at the African American woman's head, signify the imminent danger that each of these figures, but especially the young woman, faced in Cincinnati that autumn day in 1862. Current law did not then allow Union soldiers to harbor fugitive slaves who came within their lines from slaveowners seeking to reenslave them. The pose of displaying one's revolver across one's chest was uncommon in photographs taken during the Civil War.¹⁶ The weapons represent the force of military power, embodied within the young soldiers, to defend and protect the woman despite the law that did not allow Northerners to harbor fugitive slaves who sought refuge within their lines unless they previously aided Confederate troops.

The deliberate choice to brandish and position the revolvers visually captured the liminal state of freedom of the African American woman. The guns simultaneously signify her chaperones' commitment to her protection and the danger that she faced as an escaped slave

¹⁵ Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin*, 606-608.

¹⁶ In the thousands of photographs in the Civil War Photographs Collection at the Library of Congress, fewer than five feature soldiers with a revolver drawn across their chest.

constantly facing reenslavement. The chosen standing position of Quartermaster Sergeant Berch and the chosen seated position of the unnamed African American woman enabled the revolver to align with her head. Dangerously aimed at her head, the gun held by Quartermaster Sergeant Berch pointed to the main subject of the photograph. With the ability to terminate life, the revolvers wielded in the image are being brandished to demonstrate how they will preserve the life of the seated woman. As such, the image is paradoxical in its staged placidity and its violent potential: violence in the service of defending the African American woman and the violence suffered by the enslaved woman upon recapture.

Ball's image documented the intersecting racialized and gendered performance of escaping from slavery. Levi Coffin's autobiography vividly recalls not only the details of the image but also how the African American woman passed as white, and therefore a free person. But first, the woman arrived at Coffin's home in soldiers' clothing and "presented the appearance of a mulatto soldier boy."¹⁷ The next morning, after having been tended to by Coffin's wife, the young escaped slave had "transformed into a young lady of modest manners and pleasing appearance."¹⁸ The transformation included the donning of a large hoop skirt, gloves, and eventually, a veil. The accoutrements of respectable white womanhood – the veil, clothes, dress, shawl, as well as not one but two male chaperones – disguised the woman's racial identity which she and her protectors evidently understood to be a liability to her freedom. The composition of the photograph stresses the importance of representing womanhood because the photograph is taken far away from its subjects, and in so doing, highlights the enormity of her voluminous dress. The image therefore drew attention to her attire which is the vehicle that not only helped transport her safely to the photography studio, but later to freedom in Wisconsin.

¹⁷ Coffin, *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin*, 607.

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Seated, the young woman projects the image of a young lady at leisure. The camera's distance from the sitters also showcases the woman's dress thereby emphasizing her respectable attire. As evidence of one method by which enslaved African Americans pursued freedom, the photograph visually highlights how publically perceived white womanhood could be fashioned entirely out of clothing and company, not physiology. Her racial identity is revealed to the photographer and the viewers of the image as Quartermaster Sergeant Berch held her veil back to reveal the woman seeking refuge beneath it. The viewer of the image is privy to the secret of her racial background unlike the train passengers who shared a first-class cabin with her. In fact, her attire in Ball's gallery may have been precisely what she wore as she boarded the train since Coffin recorded that she "was nicely dressed, and wore a veil [sic], presenting the appearance of a white lady" when he helped her board the train.¹⁹

The image depicting the three figures curiously catalogs the importance vested in the creation of an image of a formerly enslaved person seeking freedom. Though only in Cincinnati for a maximum of two days before departing, the three people in the photograph decided to record their transgressive activity by risking discovery when they ventured out into public. The very creation of the photograph documents the importance that the figures invested in the creation of the photograph. At the cost of risking exposure and seizure, the young woman covered herself in the trappings of white womanhood to visit a black photographer. Indeed, the three figures trusted J.P. Ball to keep their freedom mission secret. One can imagine the three figures walking together to the daguerrean gallery of J.P. Ball, with the woman's dark veil drawn to cover her brown face, her gloves worn to cover her brown hands, and her shawl drawn high on her neck to cover any sign of her skin color. The duality between exposure and invisibility continues in Ball's photograph which shows the woman displaying only her left, gloved hand;

¹⁹ Ibid.

the other is tucked somewhere beneath her shawl. Draped under clothing and hidden in plain sight, her concealed hand is a metaphor for her time in Cincinnati as a fugitive slave.

Despite the large amount of information provided by Ball's image and Levi Coffin's testimony, they do not record the name of the young woman who escaped enslavement. Coffin wrote that, after the young woman changed out of her soldier's clothing, she "won the interest of all by her intelligence and amiable character."²⁰ It would be expected that at some point she revealed her name to the two men who accompanied her to Cincinnati and to the members of Levi Coffin's household. The bottom front of the *carte de visite* does not bear the names of the three figures, though someone recorded the names, hometowns, ranks, and regiments of the two men on the back of the image. Not included is the name of the young woman. A letter from Quartermaster Sergeant Berch, whose friends in Racine, Wisconsin arranged the young woman's arrival, revealed that she had married a barber and moved to Illinois.²¹ No more is known about the woman.²² The story about her escape and the image captured in Ball's studio offer a testament to her life and the subversive decisions of escaped slaves to realize their freedom.

FROM CONTRABAND TO CITIZEN-SOLDIER

The enlistment of black men into the Union forces provoked a change in the ways that illustrated newspapers depicted African American men. Long before the federal government created the Bureau of Colored Troops in May of 1863, escaped slaves had engaged in much of

²⁰ Ibid..

²¹ Ibid., 609.

²² The silences surrounding African American women attempting to gain their freedom during the Civil War are being filled by scholars. See Thavolia Glymph, "Rose's War and the Gendered Politics of a Slave Insurgency in the Civil War," *Journal of the Civil War Era* 3, no.4 (December 2013): 501-532; Hannah Rosen, *Terror in the Heart of Freedom: Citizenship, Sexual Violence and the Meaning of Race in the Postemancipation South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).

the work that white Union soldiers initially had performed.²³ They also enlisted in and were recruited to join the Union Army after the federal government first denied their enlistment on the grounds of race. Particularly after President Abraham Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation, the Union actively attempted to enlist free black men and contraband slave men into the ranks of the Army and Navy. This military development revived questions concerning black citizenship, black masculinity, and the future of the United States. After much debate, the First Regiment, United States Colored Troops, was mustered in at the nation's capital on June 30, 1863. Before the war's end, more than one hundred and eighty thousand black men fought in the Civil War for the Union. As African American men organized into government-sanctioned regiments in the Union Army and Navy, illustrated newspapers began to report their activities on the battlefield to those on the home front eager to read about the war developments. What resulted was a marked difference in the ways illustrators chose to depict contraband men and black soldiers, many thousands of whom had been contraband slaves.

Enlisting in the Union Army or Navy were ways that men could prove their manliness. The concept of masculinity in American was founded on personal attributes such as bravery, honesty, duty, and honor that manifested themselves in the words, actions, and appearance of the men who aspired to idealized versions of these attributes. Recognition of these qualities was often denied to black men and women, and contraband slaves in particular, in part, because slavery allegedly corrupted the character of black people. Additionally, the issue of denying black men the qualities of masculinity that many white men enjoyed was compounded by the fact that neither slaveowners nor the federal government recognized the citizenship of black

²³ Confederate forces used slave labor to perform many of the tasks that contraband slaves in Union camps were assigned. See James M. McPherson, *Crossroads of Freedom: Antietam* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002); Bruce Levine, *Confederate Emancipation: Southern Plans to Free and Arm Slaves during the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

slaves. Masculinity was inextricably tied to citizenship, which in turn was enacted according to a series of rights that white men possessed more than any other combination of race or gender in America. Not possessing the citizenship that white men benefitted from and initially being barred from enlisting to fight in the Civil War, black men, and contraband men in particular, were denied the public recognition of masculinity that was bound up with courage, honor, and bravery.²⁴

With respect to the appearance of masculinity, facial hair worn by men was not only fashionable in America, but also widely understood to be a manly quality in the middle of the nineteenth century. Turning to the pages of *Harper's* and *Leslie's*, two of the most popular newspapers in the country, readers could often see many advertisements for facial hair growth stimulant. One of these advertisements claimed that "the Onguent [a facial hair stimulant] is an indispensable article in every gentleman's toilet."²⁵ Thus, growing and maintaining facial hair was a visual marker of not only manliness, but also the character of a gentleman. Multiple advertisements for ointments abound in almost every weekly issue of *Harper's* and *Leslie's* during the Civil War. Possessing a mustache or a full beard was thus desirable, or at least marketed as desirable, to men, and primarily white men in the urban North given the circulation of these newspapers. Over the course of the Civil War, the advertisements would have been read by thousands of men given their repeated presence in these periodicals.

The association of facial hair with manliness was not confined to the advertisement spaces in *Leslie's* and *Harper's*. According to one news report printed in *Harper's*:

A 'Bearded Ball' was recently given at Chicago, at which no gentleman was admitted without some hairy honor to his face. At the supper table, among the toasts and speeches denunciatory of

²⁴ See James M. McPherson, *For Cause and Comrades: Why Men Fought in the Civil War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998); Craig Thompson Friend and Lorri Glover, eds., *Southern Manhood: Perspectives on Masculinity in the Old South* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2004)

²⁵ "Bellingham's Onguent," *Harper's Weekly*, March 2, 1861, 143.

shaving, was the following: ‘*Man* – Full-grown, bearded, Nature's great master-work; too noble to be barefaced, too perfect to be botched by the bungling of barberism.’ The entertainment closed with the ‘Bearded Quadrille,’ a dance made for the occasion.²⁶

The article linked facial hair with the qualities of masculinity that included honor and nobility. Those who attended the ceremony specifically for bearded and mustachioed men reveled in the hair that marked them as men and celebrated by drinking and dancing. Celebrating their manly facial hair was perhaps the wise thing to do since, as one article in *Harper's* claimed, a beard promised a long life.²⁷ Walt Whitman took a more serious stance when revering the sacredness of the human body, which included his “manly beard.”²⁸

The denial of black contraband men's masculinity manifested itself visually: contraband men overwhelmingly lacked facial hair in images. Facial hair was a visual marker of difference; it literally distinguished the men from the boys. It also separated the white Union soldiers from the black contraband slaves. The illustrators of *Harper's* and *Leslie's* rarely depicted contraband men with facial hair. The effect, especially when compared to the countless number of white soldiers with mustaches, sideburns, and beards was one of not only emasculation, but also an element of childlike appearance. When coupled with illustrations of contrabands invoking the stereotyped, puerile behavior of blackface minstrels, Northern white audiences were encouraged to view both the bodies and the actions of contraband slaves as infantile, immature, and not deserving of the rights and citizenship from which white men profited.

The social and political messages conveyed by images of smooth-faced contraband men were reinforced when *Harper's* and *Leslie's* began printing illustrations of bearded and mustachioed contraband men who performed heroic acts and the black soldiers who fought with the Union. If facial hair was an indicator of masculinity like *Harper's*, *Leslie's*, and other

²⁶ “Personal,” *Harper's Weekly*, March 12, 1859, 167.

²⁷ Harriet Martineau, “Dress and Its Victims,” *Harper's Weekly*, December 3, 1859, 780.

²⁸ “Poem of The Body” in Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass* (Brooklyn, 1856), 178. Online copy located at <http://www.whitmanarchive.org/published/LG/1856/whole.html>. Accessed April 10, 2009.

popular culture outlets proclaimed, then depicting these black men with facial hair afforded them a visual semblance of masculinity that they were denied according to the status of “slaves” and “contrabands.” Furthermore, by acquiring one of the visual tropes of masculinity, they were depicted as being one step closer to the status of citizen. The Governor of Massachusetts, John Andrew, confirmed this in a speech about black soldiers in the 54th Regiment of Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry that he gave in 1863 when he declared:

Today we recognize the right of every man in this Commonwealth to be a man and a citizen. We see before us a band of as noble men as ever came together for a great and glorious cause; they go not for themselves alone, but they go to vindicate a foul aspersion that they were not men... we welcome them as citizens of the Old Bay State.²⁹

While not mentioning facial hair, Governor Andrew’s words highlighted the defamation that black men suffered when white citizens did not recognize them as men. By refuting this claim and further rhetorically recognizing them as citizens of Massachusetts, he linked the connection between being a man and being a citizen. One way that the illustrators working for *Harper’s* and *Leslie’s* conveyed the manliness and potential citizenship was through facial hair (see Figure 4-5).

Facial hair was not the only change in the depiction of contraband slaves who performed heroic deeds or joined the Union Army. Indeed, the pose, posture, and attire of black men who, in the eyes of discerning Civil War era readers, had elevated themselves above the station of slave or contraband were markedly different. Illustrators, whose hand controlled the visual representations of these people, showed their audience a contraband slave wearing a suit and facial hair, directly engaging the reader with eye contact and a facial expression that did not bear the mark of blackface minstrelsy shown in images of other contraband slaves. The portrait of

²⁹ “James Henry Gooding to the *New Bedford Mercury*, May 24, 1863,” as reprinted in Virginia Matzke Adams, ed., *On the Altar of Freedom: A Black Soldier’s Civil War Letters from the Front* (Boston: University of Massachusetts Press, 1991), 24.

Robert Smalls more closely resembles mid-nineteenth century portraiture as hinted by the posture and portion of the figure captured. Smalls, who later went on to serve the people of

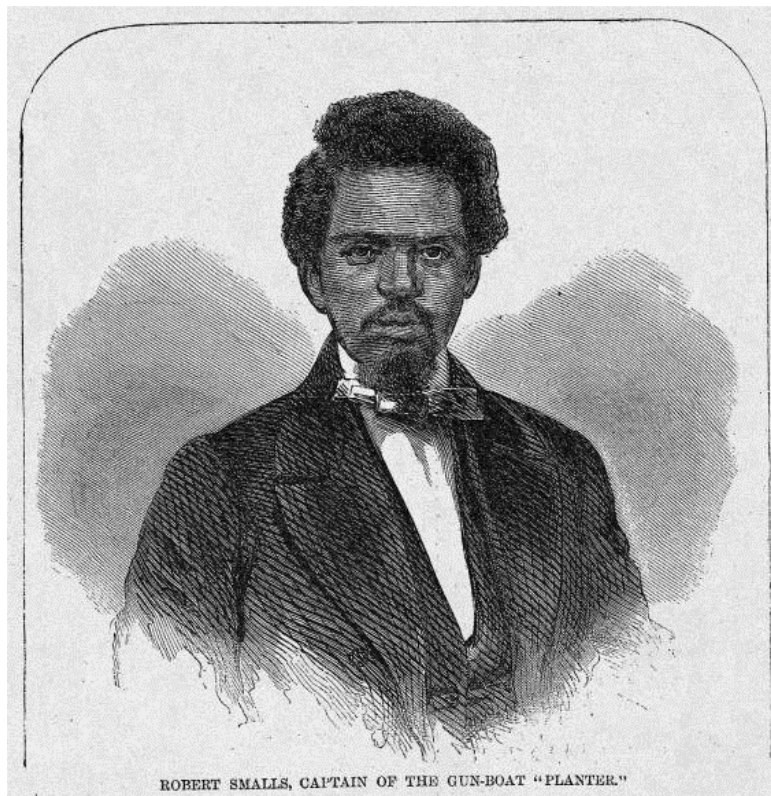


Figure 4-5. *Harper's Weekly*, June 14, 1862, 372.
"Robert Smalls, Captain of the Gun-Boat 'Planter.'"

South Carolina in both houses of the state legislature, appears to be respectable and befitting the heroic act of seizing a Confederate ship and turning it over to Union forces.³⁰ The fact that this man was named also stood in stark contrast to the dozens of anonymous contraband people featured in the pages of *Harper's* and *Leslie's*. The inclusion of Smalls' name, coupled with the nature of the illustration, which was akin to that of a photograph, encouraged viewers of the image to see him as someone different than the other contrabands: he was an individual, not a

³⁰ Robert Smalls later fought in the U.S. Navy and then served as a U.S. Congressman and State Senator. For more information about his life and political career, see Edward Miller, *Gullah Statesman: Robert Smalls from Slavery to Congress, 1839-1915* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1995).

type.³¹ Furthermore, he was not a stereotype of a male contraband. This image of him visually resisted this typecast since he dons a suit instead of a torn shirt and torn pants, and parted his hair to the side instead of covering it with a hat.

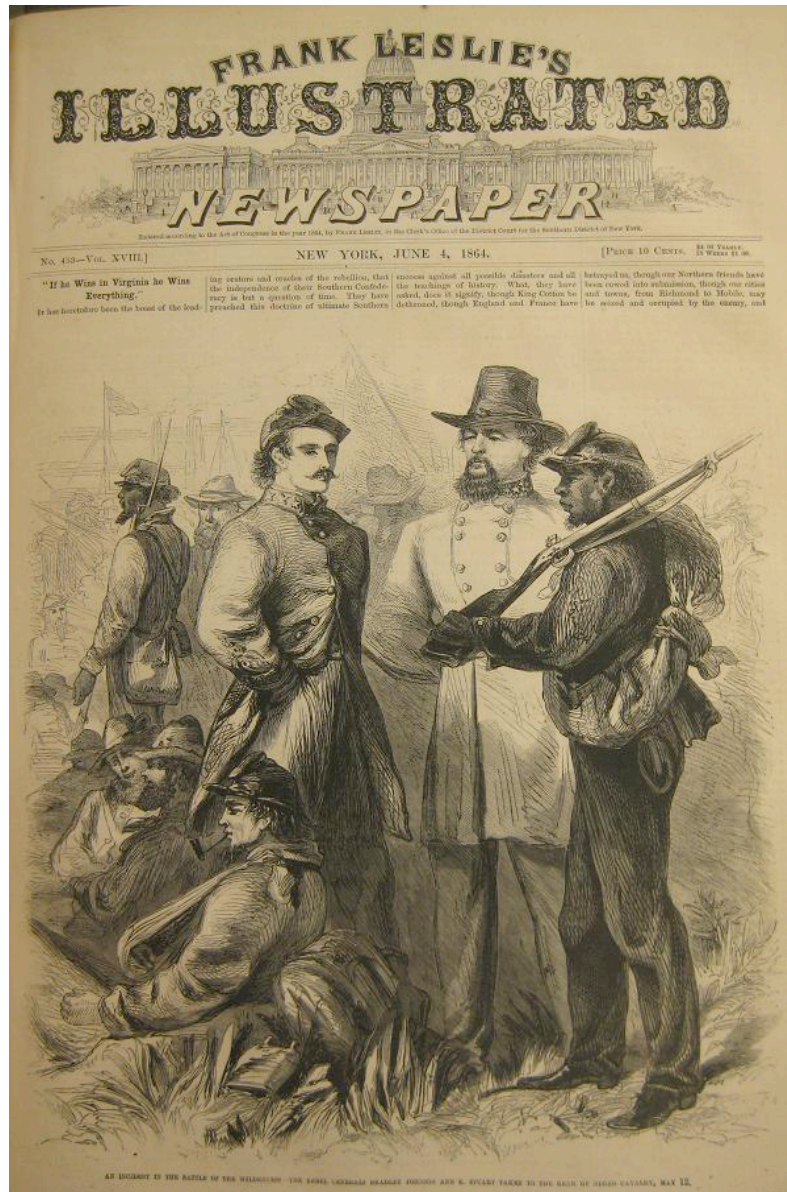


Figure 4-6. Front page of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, June 4, 1864, 61. "An Incident In the Battle of the Wilderness." Courtesy of the William L. Clements Library.

³¹ The engraving of Robert Smalls that appeared in the June 14, 1862 edition of *Harper's Weekly* was made from a May 1862 tintype currently held at the Hagley Museum and Library in Wilmington, Delaware.

Illustrators also elevated black Union soldiers to the status of individuals fighting for the same national cause as white Union soldiers. *Leslie's* prominently conveyed this message when it printed a full-page photograph of black and white Union soldiers standing together (see Figure 4-6). Far from the image of the dancing, seemingly carefree contraband, the black Union soldiers stand guard with their rifles and bayonets prominently displayed to the viewer of the image. These black men do not join their white comrades on the ground, but instead seem ready at a moment's notice to draw their weapons and fight for their country. They also joined their white officers and comrades in having facial hair, a uniform, and one of them can be seen wearing shoes. Such an image conveyed the idea that black men were equally ready and prepared to serve their country by mustering out and fighting for the Union. Figure 4-6 also implies that these black men have proven their manliness by aspiring to the idealized notions of duty, honor, and courage that was believed to be indispensable for a Union soldier. Possessing some of the trappings of nineteenth century masculinity, these black men seemed more prepared for citizenship than they had after escaping from their owners' plantations. This image, and images like it, served as a platform from which black men in particular could audition for the rights of citizenship by allying themselves with the Union, donning the blue uniform and fighting for the federal government.³²

BANNISTER AND BALL: THE TROPES OF RECORDING BLACK UNION MILITARY MEN

Very few photographs captured by African American photographers of black Union soldiers remain extant. Though some surely have yet to come to scholars' attention, the histories surrounding the photographs reveal specific reasons for which more images of African

³² Jennifer C. James, *A Freedom Bought with Blood: African American War Literature from the Civil War to World War II* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 78.

Americans taken by black photographers are not currently known. White photographers such as Mathew Brady, Alexander Gardner, Timothy O’Sullivan, and George Barnard are well known to scholars today. Beginning nearly two decades before the Civil War, Mathew Brady had dedicated his professional life to creating and preserving a visual record of the most influential figures in American life. His tireless self-promotion and assiduous drive to establish an archive of domestic and international politicians, artists, actors, businessmen, scientists, and military men was unmatched by any photographer during the Civil War era.³³ Compared to Alexander Gardner, his former-apprentice who struck out on his own, Brady largely eschewed images of death and wartime loss for portraits of regiments and landscapes “from which all evidence of war had vanished.”³⁴ Views of African Americans, with the exception of images of contraband youth at the feet of Union soldiers, might have reminded viewers about the divisive topic of slavery over which the war was fought and thus either a conscious or unconscious decision was made to largely leave undocumented the hundreds of thousands of escaped slaves following soldiers and fleeing to Union camps. Photographing these individuals of lesser social status certainly did not align with Brady’s professional goal to preserve for posterity the likenesses of the great historical figures of the United States.³⁵

Compared to the white Civil War photographers well known to scholars today, African American photographers possessed a different set of ideas and competing sets of interests around the role of visual culture. Highly ambitious, James Presley Ball did not have the well-established reputation of capturing the likenesses of presidents and politicians before the Civil War. Many presidents, cabinet members, senators, and presidential candidates, after all, had posed in Brady’s studio before the outbreak of the Civil War. Ball’s decision to develop his career in

³³ Panzer, *Mathew Brady and the Image of History*, 15.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, 1, 116.

Cincinnati and not Washington D.C. or New York City like Brady and Alexander Gardner influenced who sat before him. Likewise, Bannister decided to remain in and around Boston where he had established himself within the African American community. The priorities of Ball and Bannister to remain on the home front help explain why no black photographers are known to have created their own images on or near battlefields. The rare images of Ball and Bannister that survive from this era underscore that though geographically distant, the weight of the Civil War was near to them. Indeed, neither Ball nor Bannister aggressively attempted to replicate the professional trajectory of Brady or Gardner. Their images testify to competing ideas over what the role of visual culture could play during the Civil War. Instead of Brady's "essentially romantic" project or the death and loss that Gardner's images emphasized, the few remaining images of Ball and Bannister testify to people carrying on with their lives while continuing to be mindful of the unrest that war creates.³⁶

The business of being a photographer on or near the front lines presented a host of scenarios that photographers otherwise would not have encountered. Transporting supplies to and from the front lines not only compromised the chemicals and other supplies needed to create images, it also required the proper equipment and assistants. Though new clients could be secured in new areas, photographers jeopardized potential income from communities that already knew of their services. Furthermore, the closer to warfare one traveled, the greater the likelihood to become a victim of unintended or deliberate violence. Traveling to and photographing on the warfront separated the photographer from his or her family, and compromised the financial stability of the household, assuming that funds proved difficult to transfer from the warfront to the homefront at a given time. In short, the risks of being a photographer following the Civil War soldiers and sailors proved great indeed. Given these drawbacks, it may come as no surprise then

³⁶ Ibid., 2.

that neither Ball nor Edward Mitchell Bannister journeyed to document the Civil War from outside their studios.

For Edward Mitchell Bannister, the path to becoming a noted visual artist began after he moved to Boston in approximately 1850. Born around 1828 in St. Andrews, Canada, Bannister tried his luck as a barber while painting when he had the chance.³⁷ Many came to know of the young painter after William Cooper Nell, the influential black activist and writer, praised one of Bannister's paintings in his 1855 book, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution*.³⁸ Even before that, Nell had published a letter in the *Liberator* praising the same painting that hung in the study of John Van Surly DeGrasse, the first African American doctor admitted to a medical society in the United States. In 1854, Nell remarked that “[i]t is safe to predict for him [Bannister], at no distant day, that encouragement which should reward such self-taught exertions.”³⁹ Bannister put his barbershop in Marlboro, Massachusetts up for sale in the summer of 1857 and listed his reason for selling as “going into other business.”⁴⁰ It was true; in June of 1857, Bannister married Christiana Babcock Carteaux, a successful entrepreneur of African American and Narragansett Native American heritage who owned several hairdressing salons in Boston. With the financial stability provided by Carteaux's business prowess, Bannister gave up barbering for painting and photography.

The antislavery community in Boston and its vibrant African American community fostered Bannister's political awareness.⁴¹ His social circles included the most prominent African

³⁷ Bannister's barbershop in Malden, Massachusetts was one of three shops broken into during the night of May 7, 1852. See “Storebreaking,” *Boston Daily Atlas*, May 11, 1852, 1.

³⁸ William Cooper Nell, *The Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* (Boston: Robert F. Wallcut, 1855), 318.

³⁹ William Cooper Nell, “Colored Genius,” *Liberator* (Boston), August 11, 1854, 127.

⁴⁰ “Barber's Shop For Sale,” *Boston Herald*, May 21, 1857, 4.

⁴¹ Scholars have long documented the activist, and sometimes radical, strategies implemented by the African American population of Boston. See James O. Horton and Lois E. Horton, *In Hope of Liberty: Culture, Community, and Protest Among Northern Free Blacks, 1700-1860* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997); W. Caleb McDaniel, “The Fourth and the First: Abolitionist Holidays, Respectability, and Radical Interracial Reform,”

American leaders living in Boston where Bannister became extensively involved in several causes to aid free and enslaved African Americans. In an effort to resurrect and preserve the memory of Crispus Attucks, an African American and Native American man killed at the Boston Massacre in 1770, Bannister performed as a member of the Crispus Attucks Glee Club during the Commemorative Celebration of Crispus Attucks and the Boston Massacre in Faneuil Hall on March 5, 1858.⁴² There, William Lloyd Garrison and Wendell Phillips joined Charles Lenox Remond as speechmakers and attendees who vociferously protested the recent *Dred Scott v. Sandford* Supreme Court decision.⁴³ The next year, Bannister attended the New England Colored Citizen's Convention in Boston where other delegates appointed him to the Committee on Roll when members discussed further opposition to the Fugitive Slave Act, the *Dred Scott* outcome, and colonization in Africa.⁴⁴ If he had not met them before, Bannister had the opportunity to speak with Charles Lenox Remond, William Wells Brown, William Still, J. Sella Martin, and other prominent black leaders present at the Convention. Bannister also rallied Bostonians together to assist those people arrested for freeing an escaped slave, John Price, from slave catchers who had overtaken him near Oberlin, Ohio in 1858.⁴⁵ They then affirmed their support for the people who rescued Smith and raised \$50 to defend the thirty-seven people indicted by a federal grand jury for the nationally publicized event.⁴⁶

Bannister continued his activism during the Civil War. As a member and later trustee of the Twelfth Baptist Church in Boston, Bannister learned of the dire circumstances faced by

American Quarterly, 57 no.1 (March 2005): 129-151; Mitch Kachun, "Antebellum African Americans, Public Commemoration, and the Haitian Revolution: A Problem of Historical Mythmaking," *Journal of the Early Republic*, 26, no. 2 (Summer 2006): 249-273.

⁴² Regarding the "historical amnesia" surrounding Attucks and the methods of commemoration that began in the late 1850s in Boston, see Mitch Kachun, "From Forgotten Founder to Indispensable Icon: Crispus Attucks, Black Citizenship, and Collective Memory, 1770-1865," *Journal of the Early Republic* 29, no. 2 (Summer 2009): 249-286;

⁴³ "Commemorative Meeting in Faneuil Hall," *Liberator* (Boston), February 26, 1858, 35.

⁴⁴ "New England Colored Citizens' Convention," *Liberator* (Boston), August 19, 1859, 132.

⁴⁵ "Oberlin Rescuers," *Liberator*, June 10, 1859, 90.

⁴⁶ "Meeting of Colored Citizens," *Boston Traveler*, May 25, 1859, 4.

contraband people in Washington D.C. after testimony shared by the Church's spiritual leader, Reverend Leonard Grimes. Bannister served as the secretary for a meeting that created the Association for the Relief of the Destitute Contrabands. With the organization's constitution drawn up and the all-women officers appointed, the meeting collected twenty barrels of clothing and \$24 for the contraband people.⁴⁷ A week before President Lincoln announced the final draft of the Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863, Bannister served as secretary to a crowded meeting at the Twelfth Baptist Church. There, he heard several African American leaders debate whether or not to have an event celebrating the implementation of the Emancipation Proclamation because of widespread doubt that it would take effect.⁴⁸ Amid the "greatest confusion" in the "tremendous crowd," a vote determined that the celebration would occur and Bannister served on the Committee of Arrangements for the momentous celebration. The morning and afternoon sessions of the celebration were free and open to the public, interspersed by choral music, and readings of the Proclamation in Tremont Temple. Organizers collected a ten-cent admission fee to aid the "National Freedmen" during the evening session.⁴⁹

Christiana Carteaux Bannister, and her husband Edward, promoted Edward's work and aided the cause of escaped slaves and black Union soldiers. She helped organize a fundraiser that raised monies for the widows of the "colored American heroes" of Harper's Ferry and advocated for the building of a monument to their memory.⁵⁰ The radical abolitionist, John Brown, had been close to Lewis Hayden, the formerly enslaved man who sometimes defended fugitive slaves in his home from slave catchers with weapons, and provided boarding for the Bannister couple in

⁴⁷ "Association for the Relief of Destitute Contrabands," *Liberator*, October 10, 1862, 163.

⁴⁸ "Affairs About Home," *Boston Herald*, December 24, 1862, 2.

⁴⁹ "Emancipation Day," *Liberator*, December 26, 1862, 207.

⁵⁰ "The Combination Effort," *Liberator*, January 20, 1860, 11.

his home between 1859 and 1860.⁵¹ But it was Carteaux Bannister who acted as president in her role among the Colored Ladies of Massachusetts organization to plan a fair to accept donations on behalf of the black soldiers of the 54th and 55th Massachusetts Volunteers and their families in May 1864.⁵² The 54th and 55th regiments refused their salaries altogether in protest of the federal government's initial refusal to pay black soldiers the same salaries as white soldiers. The fair led by Carteaux Bannister sought to assist their families during this financial hardship. Lydia Maria Child attended the fair and reported later that "at the head of the hall was a full length portrait of Col. Shaw, painted by Bannister; and above it, in large embroidered letters, was the touching and appropriate motto, 'Our Martyr.'" ⁵³ The three-quarter length portrait of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the white commander of the black 54th Massachusetts Regiment who had died at Fort Wagner hung above attendees for the weeklong fair. Estimated to fetch \$200 by raffle, the painting helped the fair raise nearly \$4,000.⁵⁴

Around the time that Bannister painted Colonel Shaw, he photographed his friend and fellow black activist, John Van Surly DeGrasse. As one of the earliest known patrons of Bannister's work, DeGrasse sat for his portrait in 1852, as did his wife Cordelia Howard DeGrasse.⁵⁵ Cordelia performed on the piano at the Commemorative Celebration of Crispus Attucks and the Boston Massacre in Faneuil Hall in March of 1858 where John also sang.⁵⁶ A student of the Boston doctor Samuel R. Childs, DeGrasse received his medical degree after

⁵¹ Jane Lancaster, "I Would Have Made Out Very Poorly Had It Not Been For Her': The Life and Work of Christianna Bannister, Hair Doctress and Philanthropist," *Rhode Island History* 59, no.4 (2001), 109. Lewis Hayden had recruited several African American men to join John Brown at Harper's Ferry. See Hannah N. Geffert, "John Brown and his Black Allies: An Ignored Alliance," *Pennsylvania Magazine of History and Biography* 126, no.4 (October 2002), 600, n46.

⁵² "An Appeal to the Public," *Boston Evening Transcript*, May 10, 1864, 2.

⁵³ "Letter From Mrs. Child," *Liberator*, November 18, 1864, 185.

⁵⁴ "Local Matters," *Boston Daily Advertiser*, October 19, 1864, 1; Romare Bearden and Harry Henderson, *A History of African American Artists from 1792 to the Present* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1993), 43.

⁵⁵ Juanita Marie Holland, "To Be Free, Gifted, and Black: African American Artist Edward Mitchell Bannister," *International Review of African American Art* 12, no.1 (January 1995), 11.

⁵⁶ "Commemorative Meeting in Faneuil Hall," *Liberator* (Boston), February 26, 1858, 35.

graduating from Bowdoin Medical College in 1849 and then practiced medicine in Paris.⁵⁷ He settled in Boston where his house calls to aid fugitive slaves and other patients made him well-known among the African American community. When not practicing medicine, he attended meetings that debated the merits of African Colonization, conferred Masonic honors on Hayden Lewis, and participated in the vibrant Twelfth Baptist Church congregation.⁵⁸ He enlisted in the Union Army and served as an assistant surgeon in the 25th Colored Infantry (see Figure 4-7).



Figure 4-7. Edward Mitchell Bannister “John Van Surly DeGrasse.” *Carte de visite*. Circa 1863-1865. Courtesy of the Massachusetts Historical Society.

⁵⁷ “A Colored Physician,” *Frederick Douglass’ Paper*, September 22, 1854, 2.

⁵⁸ “The Colored Citizens of New York and the African Civilization Society,” *Liberator*, May 4, 1860, 72; “Affairs About Boston,” *Pacific Appeal* (San Francisco), November 1, 1862, 3.

Edward Bannister's image of DeGrasse bore many of the standard elements of Civil War portraiture of Union soldiers taken in photographic studios. Dressed in his military uniform, DeGrasse stands looking at the camera in a three-quarter view that prominently displays a saber at his hip, a military object of high rank that is emphasized by its contrasting color against DeGrasse's pant leg and the placement of his left hand on the same hip. His right leg bent at the knee in a contrapposto pose, he rests his right hand on the edge of a table that is barely visible on the left of the image. Beneath his dark hat, he wears a long, full beard. With a plain, light-colored background that contrasts with DeGrasse's blue Union uniform, the image encourages viewers to concentrate on DeGrasse and his military paraphernalia. Without one of the painted background scenes to place DeGrasse within an imagined context of the battleground, his status as a Union soldier is the sole focus of the photograph. This may come as no surprise given the heated debates among free black Bostonians to fight for the Union cause. Wearing the Union uniform and serving the Union was a mark of pride and character especially after the long fight to enlist black men.⁵⁹

Another image of an African American Union military member, created during the Civil War, is known to survive from the Cincinnati photographic studio of Ball and Thomas (see Figure 4-8). Wearing the standard uniform of a Union sailor, the young black man stands facing the viewer in the full-length portrait. Immediately behind him can be seen the feet of a posing stand that held the sailor's body, and perhaps his head as well, motionless so that the resulting photograph would not record blur from movement. Further behind, a background scene depicts a gracious outdoor terrace beyond which trees, mountains, and sky fill out the peaceful scene. The placid background scenery strikingly contrasts with the realities of war present during the young

⁵⁹ For more on the debates about and reactions to the enlistment of black Union soldiers, see Ira Berlin, Joseph P. Reidy, Leslie S. Rowland, eds., *Freedom: A Documentary History of Emancipation, Series II, Book I: The Black Military Experience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

sailor's enlistment. Those black Ohio men who enlisted mostly joined the 5th and 27th Colored Infantry Regiments. Those who joined the Union Navy were, as scholar Steven Ramold argued, often able to gain more leadership positions, receive equal pay, and experience fairer treatment than their black Union Army counterparts.⁶⁰



Figure 4-8. “[Full length portrait of an African American sailor, facing front].” Ball & Thomas Studio. Circa 1861-1865. Courtesy of the Library of Congress.

Cincinnati's advantageous location on the Ohio River supported a thriving population of black dock workers. By 1850, boatmen made up the largest percentage – 18% – of black male

⁶⁰ Steven J. Ramold, *Slaves, Sailors, Citizens: African Americans in the Union Navy* (DeKalb, Illinois: Northern Illinois University Press, 2002).

workers in Cincinnati.⁶¹ Ten years later, the census listed 18.5% of African American men as boat hands but that did not include other occupations on board such as steamboat fireman, barbers, cabin boys, and cooks.⁶² Highly segregated, in part, due to the strong Southern culture that crept up its alluvial lifeline, the city fostered a free black community dependent on the commerce of the Ohio River. Sometimes black dockworkers assisted fugitive slaves escaping to freedom⁶³ just as Union sailors occasionally did.⁶⁴ Black men with experience working on ships and completing tasks along the docks would have found much of the work in the Union Navy to be similar.

Why would a member of the Union military wish to have his photograph taken? By March of 1861, Ball advertised that he “[was] introducing a new style of Pictures, known as Photograph Visiting Cards” which were “neat and cheap.”⁶⁵ In other advertisements, he directed his advertisements directly to military men: “Soldiers about to leave home should not forget that the Mammoth Daguerrian [sic] Rooms of J.P. Ball, at No. 30 West Fourth-Street, will supply them with splendid pictures, at panic prices.”⁶⁶ In another, he reminded those about to muster out to the warfront: “Don’t go to the wars without first repairing... and sitting for one of [Ball’s] truthful Pictures, which [you should] present to the girl you leave behind you.”⁶⁷ That week, Ball & Thomas reported that their studio was “overrun with business” because, as the title of their advertisement read, “The War Has Begun.”⁶⁸ Ball’s fortunate proximity to the Union

⁶¹ Henry L. Taylor, “Spatial Organization and the Residential Experience: Black Cincinnati in 1850,” *Social Science History* 10, no.1 (Spring 1986), 56.

⁶² Nikki Taylor, *Frontiers of Freedom: Cincinnati’s Black Community, 1802-1868* (Athens, OH: Ohio University Press, 2005), 212.

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 152.

⁶⁴ William Benjamin Gould, *Diary of a Contraband: The Civil War Passage of a Black Sailor* (Redwood City, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002).

⁶⁵ “The Original Ball Ahead Again,” *Cincinnati Daily Press*, March 16, 1861, 2.

⁶⁶ “Home Interest,” *Cincinnati Daily Press*, April 23, 1861, 2.

⁶⁷ “Home Interest,” *Cincinnati Daily Press*, May 22, 1861, 2.

⁶⁸ “The War Has Begun,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, May 26, 1861, 2.

headquarters of Camp Dennison brought one of his targeted demographics near his studio. In an article about Ball and his clientele, the pseudonymous soldier reported that “[g]irls have a great love for regimentals, and the boys are sending to their ‘ladyloves’ the ‘shadow’ ere it passes away.”⁶⁹ Conversely, one young man “exhibited a picture of his ‘gal’ as he called it, and said that he was going to fight just for her sake, the promise of the girl being that she would marry him on his return from the war, if he sustained the honor of his country’s flag.”⁷⁰ Soldiers captured their ‘shadows’ for a host of reasons that transformed their *cartes de visite* into mementos, romantic gifts, and documents of Union service.

THE ANGLO-AFRICAN EXHIBITION OF INDUSTRY AND ART

Though nearly nine hundred miles away from one another, Edward Bannister and James Presley Ball together developed during the Civil War what was intended to be the most impressive display of African American art and industry yet seen in the United States. Bannister and Ball, along with other black visual artists – William Simpson, John Chaplin, and William Dorsey – sat on the Board of Directors for “The First Exhibition of the Anglo-African Institute for the Encouragement of Industry and Art.” Proposed by the prominent black Washingtonian, Edward M. Thomas, in late 1861, the exhibition revealed the networks of black leadership that supported the notion that an exhibition of black art and industry could greatly improve race relations among other lofty goals. Furthermore, the exhibition demonstrated the faith of these leaders in the social and political effects of art created by African Americans. Lastly, the planning of the exhibition made apparent the priorities of several African American leaders given the pressures and anxieties forged in the furnace of the Civil War.

⁶⁹ Slabides, “Our Military Correspondence,” *Cincinnati Daily Press*, June 20, 1861, 3.

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

In letters published in two African American periodicals in early 1862, Edward M. Thomas sounded the clarion call to hold an enormous exhibition to display art and other objects created and owned by African Americans. Though interested in spotlighting African Americans' mechanical inventions, Thomas was most interested in African American art and its creators. In his initial letters published in both the *Christian Recorder* and the *Weekly Anglo-African*, Thomas did not name any African American inventors, but instead praised many African American painters – John Chaplin, Robert Duncanson, William Dorsey, William H. Simpson, David Bustill Bowser, and S.G. Brown – while listing their cities of residence. In a later letter published in the *Weekly Anglo-African*, Thomas described a “truly magnificent work of art” painted by the African American artist, John Chaplin.⁷¹ It was but one “triumph of art” that Thomas wished that “public eyes [could] feast upon its great beauty”; Thomas hoped that Chaplin would display another painting that depicted the death of Hannibal in the upcoming exhibition.⁷² Like his first letter published in the *Weekly Anglo-African* and the *Christian Recorder*, Thomas made no mention of African American inventors and industrialists. A third letter published in the *Weekly Anglo-African* celebrated the work of the black Philadelphia painter, William H. Dorsey. Though signed “Critic” from Washington D.C., the writer used the same writing style and vocabulary to craft a laudatory article about the “inventive genius” of an African American artist while describing two of his paintings as Edward Thomas had in previously published letters. Taken together, Thomas appeared heavily invested in the additions of African American painters to American art.

The reactions printed in African American newspapers that covered the exhibition's planning eagerly supported the venture and its goals. The *Weekly Anglo-African* praised the

⁷¹ Edward M. Thomas, “A Picture by a Colored Artist,” *Weekly Anglo-African*, April 2, 1862, 2.

⁷² *Ibid.*

project and solicited its readers to write in with their comments. One reader named and commended three black Philadelphia artists while another writer offered the names of an artist – Edward Mitchell Bannister – and a mechanic, both of Massachusetts. “Quadroon,” writing from Boston, proposed to send her own “specimens of music and poetry” to the exhibition. Furthermore, the *Weekly Anglo-African* office wrote that it would field any questions or comments that its readers may have had while stating that they were “earnestly requested to lose no time in getting their articles ready” for the exhibition. More than two thousand miles away, an editorial note in the *Pacific Appeal*, an African American newspaper published in San Francisco, communicated details of the upcoming event and firmly stated: “[w]e opine it will astonish the pro-slavery libelers, who imagine there is no inventive nor artistic genius in our race.”⁷³ Subsequent issues of the newspaper described the “good progress” being made in the preparations for the event, welcomed its readers to purchase stock in the venture, urged its readers to send their creations by steamer to New York City, and even vowed to send a file of the *Pacific Appeal* for public display.⁷⁴ In the pages of the *Christian Recorder*, an editorial piece expressed that those at the Philadelphia newspaper, “are greatly in favor of just such a movement of our people, annually exhibiting to the world a fair.”⁷⁵ Envisioned there as a repeating national event with international repercussions, the exhibition was believed to “give us [African Americans] full credit for all our humble endeavors” from the English, French, and Germans even “if we did not get what we richly merit from those in this country who claim to be our

⁷³ “Our friends at the east,” *Pacific Appeal*, June 21, 1862, 2.

⁷⁴ “Eastern Items, Selected and Condensed from the Anglo-African,” *Pacific Appeal*, July 2, 1862, 3; “The National Exhibition,” *Pacific Appeal*, August 30, 1862, 2.

⁷⁵ “Exhibition of Art,” *Christian Recorder*, February 1, 1862, 18.

lords.”⁷⁶ Understood to give African Americans a spot on the world stage, the exhibition offered the opportunity to allow a large audience to realize fully black intellect and achievement.

Bringing African American art out of the shadows created by racial discrimination marked another reason for Thomas’ exhibition. For those who claimed that African Americans either did not create art or had not the capabilities to produce it, Thomas countered: “The very fact that they are urged by persons, demonstrates that such persons have never had an opportunity to judge of these facts; there has never been an occasion where the genius, talent, and acquirements of our race could be fairly exhibited.”⁷⁷ Thomas advanced the argument that never before had African Americans been able to display their artistic and mechanic achievement on such a large scale. Thomas argued that the works of art that would be placed on display made manifest African American achievements on the cultural terms judged by white Americans. In doing so, according to Thomas, African Americans urgently needed to display their artistic and mechanic achievements. With forceful language, Thomas demanded of his black readership: “Let no consideration withhold us from the attempt, and let us redeem ourselves in the eyes of those bigots who impute inferiority to us of talent...”⁷⁸ In the face of claims of African Americans’ inferiority, Thomas urged his black readers to “stand forward boldly and intrepidly, and demonstrate to a biased world, that few works of art, and they [are] far between, having been visible, is owing to our want of encouragement, and our lack of opportunity to give them publicity.”⁷⁹

Thomas envisioned the exhibition to render black cultural achievements visible by saving from obscurity African American artistic and mechanical works. Thomas wrote that the

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Edward M. Thomas, "Anglo-African Exhibition of Industry and Art," *Weekly Anglo-African*, February 2, 1862, 1.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

⁷⁹ Ibid.

exhibition would “rescue from perpetual obscurity many gems of Art” created and owned by African Americans.⁸⁰ He feared that “many a masterpiece, for want of appreciation, is left unheeded, to decay among rubbish and ruins. By having this exhibition, we may bring to light some picture of precious value.”⁸¹ Implicit in Thomas’ letter was that the precious value of said materials derived from the fact that its creators were African Americans and its merit in comparison to the artistic and mechanical objects created by white men and women. Those black people who create such work, Thomas lamented, “remain still totally unknown, together with their works, excepting to the circle of private friends, and” as he feared, “so it is, and always will be, that the talent which is now in our people, buried in obscurity and the humble walks of private life, will remain totally unknown, unless some manner of giving their talents publicity be contrived.”⁸² Thomas hoped that the increased viewership provided by such an exhibition would increase the recognition of these black cultural and industrial producers. As an act to make visible African American “genius,” Thomas believed the exhibition to serve as both an excavation and a public corrective to assumptions of African American inferiority. He wrote that African Americans displaying their work at the event “will be rescued from the obscurity of private life – we have, in fact, nothing difficult to overcome but our own inactivity; and the dislodging from the names of our people the accusations of want of genius, by presenting to the world the stern facts themselves.”⁸³

In increasing the awareness of black and non-black members of the public, Thomas endeavored to establish a history of African American art and mechanical objects. Indeed, the title for the exhibition celebrated the event as the “first National Exhibition of Anglo-African

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ Ibid.

Industry and Art.” Its scale, its aims, its publicity in African American newspapers, and its range of invited materials hinted at Thomas’ vision of the event to be an event of public record to document African American achievements. By sending their artwork and their industrial inventions to be exhibited, African Americans could accumulate evidence of their accomplishments and establish a large-scale, public historical record of artistic production. Thomas’ proposal of the exhibition marked the creation of a public record of African American “genius.”

The planning logistics of the “Anglo-African Exhibition of Industry and Art” revealed the expansive black leadership network that supported the importance of Thomas’ exhibition. The network of black men and women who planned the event stretched north from Washington D.C. to Massachusetts and west to Indiana. New York, Pennsylvania, New Jersey, Ohio, and Maryland rounded out the states where organizers planned the logistics of the event. The Reverend Henry Highland Garnet would commence the proceedings with a prayer while Frederick Douglass agreed to give the opening address. The “Lady Managers” included Ada Hinton, Augusta Lake, Juanna Howard, Harriet Rogers, and Emeline Bastien. James McCune Smith, William Whipper, and the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church Reverend Daniel A. Payne each held the title of Vice President, while the Board of Directors included the AME Reverends Willis Revels and Daniel Payne as well as the artists James Presley Ball, William Dorsey, and William Simpson. The Reverend James Gloucester, a Presbyterian minister, who had offered space to host the exhibition in Brooklyn, also sat on the Board of Directors.

Despite all the collaboration and planning, Edward Thomas jeopardized the success of the exhibition when he supported President Lincoln’s plan for African American emigration to Central America. Initially having adopted resolutions denouncing the emigration schemes

advanced by Congress and President Lincoln, Thomas met the President as part of an African American delegation to hear his proposal in person. Only a few days later, Thomas wrote to the President with the idea that delegates be sent to convince African Americans in Philadelphia, Boston, and New York whom he believed would “join heartily in sustaining such a movement.”⁸⁴ This turned out to be a fateful miscalculation on Thomas’ part. Thomas did not report the proceedings of the meeting with President Lincoln to Union Bethel Church where he had been chosen as a member of the delegation. When it was discovered that Thomas supported President Lincoln’s colonization plan, the backlash was quick and severe. As the work of historian Kate Masur has shown, the episode caused distrust of Thomas among African American leaders partly because they believed that he misrepresented their stance on colonization and because they believed Thomas mismanaged funds related to his trips to Northern cities.⁸⁵ James McCune Smith, one of the vice presidents of the “Exhibition of the Anglo-African Institute for The Encouragement of Industry and Art,” resigned from his position. His published reason – “[w]hilst our country is overwhelmed with the horrors of a bloody and disastrous war, I cannot uphold an exhibition which typifies the calm of prosperous peace” – might not fully explain his decision. That Smith made public his reason, did so during the fracas surrounding Thomas, and was staunchly opposed to President Lincoln’s plan for African American emigration, makes it likely that he also withdrew his support from the exhibition to distance himself from Thomas.

Support wavered among other members of the exhibition’s planning committee. Just weeks before the exhibition’s scheduled opening on October 1, the “urgent solicitation” of

⁸⁴ Abraham Lincoln, *The Collected Works of Abraham Lincoln, Volume 5* (New Brunswick, N.J., Rutgers University Press, 1953), 375n1 as reproduced from Edward M. Thomas to Abraham Lincoln, Aug. 16, 1862, Abraham Lincoln Papers, Library of Congress.

⁸⁵ Kate Masur, “The African American Delegation to Lincoln: A Reappraisal,” *Civil War History* 56, no.2 (June 2010): 117-144.

supporters of the event in Baltimore, Washington D.C., and Cincinnati resulted in a postponed exhibition opening in May 1863. As the only member of the planning committee from Cincinnati, Ball evidently expressed his wishes to postpone the event. The reason for oscillating support may have also been related to the pressing issues of the large influx of contraband slaves in and around Washington D.C. Edward Bannister, who sat on the exhibition's Board of Directors alongside J.P. Ball, led a meeting in Boston on September 17, 1862 to encourage attendees to donate clothing, money, and other forms of aid to the newly free people. As 1862 neared an end, the exhibition was postponed even later to October 1863.

Along with vacillating support, political fallout, and more pressing humanitarian issues, two more factors ultimately ended the plans for the exhibition's successful implementation. The death of Edward Thomas in March of 1863 marked an end to the exhibition's most vociferous and passionate advocate. Advertisements for the exhibition continued after his death in the now renamed *Anglo-African*, but where the name of the President had been listed, several dashes revealed that no one had assumed the position in Thomas' absence.⁸⁶ Advertisements and news coverage of the exhibition preparations abruptly ended little more than a week after the New York City draft rioters attacked black New Yorkers and destroyed black institutions.⁸⁷

CONCLUSION

This chapter has traced the developments that resulted in shifts in popular representations of African Americans during the Civil War. It has examined the technologies that enabled illustrated newspapers to reproduce and circulate images while analyzing newspaper editors'

⁸⁶ "The First Exhibition of the Anglo-African Institute for the Encouragement of Industry and Art," *Anglo-African*, July 4, 1863, 4.

⁸⁷ For more on the race riots that grew out of the New York City Draft Riots in the middle of July, 1863, see Leslie M. Harris, *In the Shadow of Slavery: African Americans in New York City, 1826-1863* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 279-288.

numerous strategies intended to convince viewers of the truthfulness of images depicting contraband slaves. Many of the images circulated by illustrated newspapers propagated tropes of blackface minstrelsy and other derisive stereotypes of blackness that signaled anxiety over the present and future circumstances of many thousands of escaped slaves. The enlistment of African American men into the Union military threw into relief the illustrated newspaper artists' mediation of these images with their preconceived judgments of contraband people. Facial hair and other visual changes to African American bodies such as posture and facial expression marked black soldiers as men with masculine physical and psychological traits.

Within this visual and political battleground, the chapter investigates the few extant images of African Americans created by African Americans during the Civil War. The contrasts between these images and those widely circulated in illustrated newspapers reveal how James Presley Ball created an image of a fugitive slave laden with critiques of the Fugitive Slave Law of 1850 and concerns about the future of contraband people. The two images by Ball and Bannister of enlisted African Americans underscore the notion that both artists implemented common practices to depict black Union forces; images created by black artists did not always subvert popular representations of African Americans. Instead, they depicted these military men in much the same ways that photographers depicted white Union soldiers.

One of Edward M. Thomas' goals in planning the Anglo-African Exhibition of Industry and Art, however, included the subversion of popular assumptions of African Americans. In the pages of African American newspapers, the worlds of prominent black visual artists intersected as they organized an exhibition to display the accomplishments of and cultural wealth held by black people. Thomas theorized what he believed black art could accomplish for not just African Americans but all those in the United States. He trusted that art and inventions could change the

hearts and minds of those who viewed it by offering inspiration to African Americans and correcting the low standards that Thomas believed to mire many white Americans' beliefs regarding black people.

Questions remain about the dearth of images created by African Americans during the Civil War, especially in comparison to those white photographers history has come to remember. The names and images of Mathew Brady, Alexander Gardner, and Timothy O'Sullivan have become recognizable for a host of reasons that include memorable, sometimes harrowing images reporting some of the scenes of a war unmatched in its scale of death in the United States. They also cemented their fame with photographs of famous figures, books that featured their photographs, and galleries that exhibited their images. Perhaps if the planning of the Anglo-African Exhibition had culminated in a groundbreaking display of African American art, some of the now forgotten African American images and artists of the Civil War era would be remembered today.

Chapter 5

Viewing Reconstruction: Celebration, Slavery, and the African Methodist Episcopal Church

In January 1867, Frederick Douglass traveled to Cincinnati to lecture before crowds of black and white attendees. On the evening of January 12, Douglass lectured on the topic of “Sources of Dangers to the Republic” that he would later give in St. Louis, Missouri the following month.¹ The newspaper coverage of the Cincinnati event relayed Douglass’ apprehension of and frustration with President Andrew Johnson’s presidency.² Like Robert Douglass Jr. and many other African Americans before him, Frederick Douglass called for the ubiquitous realization of the principles of equality and republicanism described in the Declaration of Independence.³ Such principles remained out of reach for the many African Americans in states where they had yet to receive civil liberties, in part, because the federal government had not yet compelled all states to provide such rights to African Americans. Douglass debated these topics during those January nights in Cincinnati. In striking and controversial gender-inclusive language, he demanded: “Let no man be excluded from the ballot box because of color, nor woman because of sex.”⁴ Douglass vehemently advocated for the suffrage of African American men, especially on the grounds of Union military service.

¹ “Sources of Danger to the Republic,” in John Blassingame, ed., *The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One: Speeches, Debates, and Interviews*, 5 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1985), 4:158.

² “Fred Douglass in Mozart Hall,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, January 13, 1867, 2. It is no coincidence that Douglass mistrusted President Johnson especially after Johnson’s support of Black Codes in the South and his hostility shown towards the Freedmen’s Bureau. See David W. Blight, *Race and Reunion: The Civil War in American Memory* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2001), 45.

³ “Fred Douglass in Mozart Hall,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, January 13, 1867, 2.

⁴ “Lecture of Fred. Douglass,” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, January 14, 1867, 1.

Soon after the first speech that Douglass gave in Cincinnati, J.P. Ball showed the staff of the *Cincinnati Daily Gazette* his recent photograph of Frederick Douglass. The exceptionally large dimensions of the “splendid” photograph – 8 x 10 inches – befit the prominence of the sitter it represented.⁵ Ball also created *cartes de visite* portraits of Douglass and sold them as souvenirs, as was common practice, to finance Douglass’ salary and the lecture series of which his speeches were a part (see Figure 5-1).⁶



Figure 5-1. Frederick Douglass. *Carte de visite*. J.P. Ball’s Photographic Gallery. January, 1867. Courtesy of the Cincinnati Historical Library and Archives.

⁵ “City News,” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, January 15, 1867, 1.

⁶ During the Civil War, Sojourner Truth raised money from her supporters by selling a series of *cartes des visite* that corrected misrepresentations of her. See Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996), 185–99. See also Mary Niall Mitchell, *Raising Freedom’s Child: Black Children and Visions of the Future after Slavery* (New York: New York University Press, 2008), 116–121 for abolitionist fundraising using *cartes de visite*.

Douglass knew well the power of images to influence personal and public judgments. Turned three quarters toward the camera, Douglass averts his eyes from the viewer and appears calm. In his growing gray streak of hair, the image captured his aging likeness. Donning a dress shirt, vest, and jacket, Douglass struck a respectable appearance. After all, he knew that viewers invested pictures with the power to shape not only their assessments of the personal character of those depicted but also broader historical and political ideologies. “The picture plays an important part in our politics,” Douglass explained in a speech approximately five years earlier, “and often explodes political shams more effectively, than any other agency.”⁷ He believed that individuals invested photographic materials with a sense of truthfulness that shifted with historical context. He recognized that the meaning of images constantly fluctuated and that viewing was a socially constructed practice: “The pictures do not change, but we look at them through the favorable or unfavorable prevailing public opinion.”⁸ As such, the viewer invested a unique series of meanings in any given image according to societal influences particular to that historical moment. The same image, when viewed during different eras, or by different people, could be imbued with wildly different meanings. During the era of Reconstruction, African Americans crafted images of African Americans that reflected a variety of the religious, political, and historical debates occurring domestically and internationally.

This chapter begins with an investigation of the critical role that the African Methodist Episcopal (AME) Church, and especially its periodical, the *Christian Recorder*, played in fostering the artistic talents and the didactic philosophies of Robert Douglass Jr. In the pages of the AME’s nationally circulated newspaper, Douglass engaged with domestic and

⁷ Frederick Douglass, “Pictures and Progress,” 457.

⁸ Ibid.

international matters concerning people of African-descent. Furthermore, his published advertisements and writings reveal the ways in which he linked issues in Cuba, Haiti, and the United States and made them relevant to those who read his articles. The chapter then moves to the civic and political foundations that supported James Presley Ball Sr.'s foray into electoral politics. His endeavors with the Republican Party and the AME Church mutually informed his success as a photographer. His involvement in a trial regarding the freedom of "Blind Tom" Wiggins elucidates Ball's aspirations, ethics, and business interests. Between toasts to John Brown, Toussaint L'Ouverture, and President Ulysses S. Grant, Ball demanded the participation of black men in electoral politics while celebrating those who enabled its realization. By investigating Ball's photographic activities alongside his participation in celebrations among Cincinnati's African American community, a failed lawsuit, and relationships with religious leaders and politicians, we see how Ball envisioned photography to strengthen African Americans' social and political power. The chapter ends by considering the images created by James Presley Ball Sr.'s brother and brother-in-law – Thomas Ball and Alexander S. Thomas – in the context of self-fashioning oneself in images. In examining the images created by these African American men, we can see how they built connections between members of African American communities, celebrated black achievement, and willed it to happen.

Moreover, this chapter charts the artistic developments of Robert Douglass Jr., James Presley Ball Sr., Alexander S. Thomas, and Thomas C. Ball. The images that they created -- of politicians, religious authorities, strangers, and family members -- underscored the debates that these cultural producers valued and took part in. That the main periodical of the AME Church, the *Christian Recorder*, featured descriptions of many of these images and the

writings of their creators is central. The coverage of these African Americans' work in the *Recorder* adds to the scholarship about the African American cultures cultivated by the Church and the *Recorder*. This chapter builds upon the historiography of the AME Church and its leaders' support for the education of African Americans during Reconstruction. It departs from current scholarship that has focused on reading cultures nurtured by the *Christian Recorder* by showing how the encouragement of *visual culture* among African Americans furthered the Church's goals of nurturing black education, expanding throughout the Reconstruction South, and training black leaders. Domestic events catalogued by these images such as the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment and the swift growth of the AME church network pinpoint some of the most pressing concerns of these black artists. Juxtaposing their civic and political activities outside of their studios, this chapter examines the on-going development of these individuals' political consciousness.

ROBERT DOUGLASS JR.'S VISUAL POLITICS FEATURED IN THE *CHRISTIAN RECORDER*

Scholars have investigated the most prominent nineteenth century AME Church leaders like Reverends Richard Allen, Benjamin Tanner, and Henry McNeal Turner to show how they shaped and were shaped by racial, religious, and political debates of their milieu.⁹ Historians have shown how these figures engaged in campaigns to rid the country of racial discrimination and aid in the moral elevation of African Americans before and after the Civil War. Debates about transnational topics such as emigration to Haiti before the Civil War and

⁹ Scholars have written several biographies of these AME Church leaders who vigorously participated in campaigns to secure social and legal privileges for African Americans while serving their religious needs. See Richard Newman, *Freedom's Prophet: Bishop Richard Allen, the AME Church, and the Black Founding Fathers* (New York: New York University Press, 2008); William Seraile, *Fire in His Heart: Bishop Benjamin Tucker Tanner and the A.M.E. Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1998); Albert G. Miller, *Elevating the Race: Theophilus G. Steward, Black Theology, and the Making of an African American Civil Society, 1865-1924* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2003); Stephen Ward Angell, *Bishop Henry McNeal Turner and African-American Religion in the South* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1992).

the promise of missionary work in Africa after the Civil War demonstrated the profoundly intertwined religious and political missions of the AME Church.¹⁰ The work of Julius H. Bailey has also shown how Church officials advocated for idealized Victorian family values among congregants after the Civil War while constantly grappling with concerns over the leadership of black women.¹¹ As the Church leadership changed over time, so too did the philosophies that guided decisions regarding emigration, transatlantic missionary work, and the roles of women in the AME Church. Despite the often clashing policies supported by Church leaders during different periods in the nineteenth century, the historiography of the AME Church portrays the institution as one whose leaders constantly worked for what they believed to be the improvement of African Americans' social and moral livelihood.

Recent scholarship has demonstrated how religious institutions and prominent black leaders shaped political discussions in church periodicals. "Far from a distinctive and separate phenomenon," one scholar has written, "the black religious press built upon the foundation laid by early pamphleteers to reframe protests in new ways in the second half of the nineteenth century."¹² Editors published articles and letters written by readers that showed African Americans expressing varying degrees of support and concern for emigration, leadership roles held by women, and decisions to educate and employ formerly enslaved people. Growing attention to the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century biographies and autobiographies of these leaders has further elucidated their decisions in shaping the course of the AME Church. Frequently advertised and reviewed in the *Christian Recorder*, these

¹⁰ James T. Campbell, *Songs of Zion: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the United States and South Africa* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1998); Lawrence Little, *Disciples of Liberty: The African Methodist Episcopal Church in the Age of Imperialism, 1884-1916* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2000).

¹¹ Julius H. Bailey, *Around the Family Altar: Domesticity in the African Methodist Episcopal Church, 1865-1900* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2005).

¹² Julius H. Bailey, *Race Patriotism: Protest and Print Culture in the AME Church* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2012), xvii.

publications marked one of the many ways in which the *Recorder* cultivated reading cultures among its African American readers.

Scholars have delved deeply into the development of nineteenth century African American reading and writing practices. As scholar Elizabeth McHenry has argued, “the *Christian Recorder*,” and other black periodicals, “were crucial to the formation of an ideal of community that affirmed reading and other literary activities as acts of public good on which the intellectual life and civic character of its members could be grounded.”¹³ Scholars have argued that early black periodicals engendered and developed political consciousness and racial identities among African American communities.¹⁴ Furthermore, the circulation of writings by black authors challenged historical misconceptions about black history and deliberately wrote histories of black leaders as corrective insertions into the historiography of the United States.¹⁵ Analyzed as types of protest literature, these works have elucidated the literary spaces in which African Americans expressed diverse opinions about the past, present, and future of the race. Discussions germane to African Americans – voting rights, black military service, emigration to Africa, “the woman question,” and black education to name but a few – appeared throughout black publications.¹⁶

Robert Douglass’ production of visual culture engaged many debates concerning the futures of African Americans during the Reconstruction era. During this era, the *Christian Recorder*, under the guidance of editor Reverend Benjamin Tucker Tanner, supported

¹³ Elizabeth McHenry, *Forgotten Readers: Recovering the Lost History of African American Literary Societies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 87.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Stephen G. Hall, *A Faithful Account of the Race: African American Historical Writing in Nineteenth-Century America* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009); John Ernest, *Liberation Historiography: African American Writers and the Challenge of History, 1794-1861* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004); Laurie Maffly-Kipp, *Setting Down the Sacred Past: African American Race Histories* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2010).

¹⁶ Bailey, *Race Patriotism*.

Douglass' contributions to its Church community. Featured within the pages of the *Recorder*, Douglass' images and later his reviews of art and translations of foreign language periodicals fit squarely within Tanner's dedication to black education and the proliferation of the arts among African Americans. The visual materials created by Douglass marked a continuation of Douglass' engagement with political debates concerning the future of African Americans. Beginning in the early 1830s, Robert Douglass Jr. campaigned for decades to end slavery in the United States. Signing petitions, participating in antislavery meetings, and creating images he hoped would inspire antislavery ardor marked many of his strategies to ensure African Americans' freedom from slavery. After the end of the Civil War, Douglass continued his business as a sign maker, portrait painter, and banner manufacturer. His strong religious affiliation with the African Methodist Episcopal Church denotes the clearest shift in his strategies of making visible the successes of and threats to black Americans. Douglass' connections to the AME Church, as well as the political beliefs made manifest in his artwork can be traced to both the physical space of the Allen AME Church in Philadelphia and the Church's periodical, the *Christian Recorder*.

Douglass' visual production demonstrated his engagement in conversations regarding campaigns for African American men's voting rights. In 1870, he showed his support for the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment with a painting that portrayed John Brown slaying a monstrous representation of slavery. Described as a "sterling picture" by the editors of the *Christian Recorder*, the image depicted John Brown "destroying American Slavery in the shape of a monster half man and half dragon."¹⁷ The image recalled the allegory of St. George slaying the dragon. Douglass' image valorized the radical abolitionist John Brown whom the United States government had executed more than a decade before. The tale of St. George

¹⁷ "Brief Editorials," *Christian Recorder*, April 16, 1870, 2.

includes him injuring and capturing a dragon before inspiring thousands of townsfolk to convert to Christianity. In much the same way, Douglass' image of Brown alluded that he stirred people in the United States to convert to the antislavery cause. Such an image was not intended to be hung in a home. The editor of the *Recorder*, the Reverend Benjamin Tanner, insisted that Douglass' work "would reflect credit upon any procession" and urged: "[b]y all means, let some of our Societies secure it."¹⁸ The editorial made it clear that a patron did not commission Douglass' image of John Brown. The large number of African American societies referenced in the article included mutual aid organizations, veterans groups, literary associations, and religious communities to name a few. As an object envisioned to be used for public consumption instead of private veneration, the acclaimed painting celebrating slavery's demise would become a public symbol commemorating the armed insurrection of John Brown as well as the downfall of slavery. Slavery, as symbolized by the double-bodied monster, had been slain.

Douglass' choice to depict John Brown instead of another figure commonly believed to have ended slavery, such as Abraham Lincoln, is not striking. As scholars have shown, the memory of Brown served as a model of African American's inspiration and "hope for social relations governed irrespective."¹⁹ In the seven years since the Emancipation Proclamation of 1863, President Lincoln increasingly become venerated within popular visual culture as the "Great Emancipator" who freed enslaved people. Heralded by numerous African Americans while vilified by many white Americans, John Brown and his tactics of armed rebellion represented a controversial strategy to effect freedom. Douglass' painting depicted Brown as

¹⁸ "Brief Editorials," *Christian Recorder*, April 16, 1870, 2.

¹⁹ Andrew W. Kahrl, "The Political Work of Leisure: Class, Recreation and African American Commemoration at Harper's Ferry, West Virginia, 1881-1931," *Journal of Social History* 42, no.1 (Fall 2008): 57-77; Benjamin Quarles, *Allies for Freedom: Blacks and John Brown* (New York: De Capo Press, 1974); Louis A. DeCaro, Jr., "Black People's Ally, White People's Bogeyman: A John Brown Story," in *The Afterlife of John Brown*, eds. Andrew Taylor and Eldrid Herrington (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2005), 20.

being the individual whose actions engendered the fall of slavery, despite his small-scale and immediately ineffective actions. Yet, the enduring legacy of John Brown inspired several antislavery activists like Douglass in the years after Brown's execution and even in the years after the Thirteenth Amendment outlawed slavery in the United States. Douglass' decision to craft this image to celebrate the last Reconstruction Amendment underscores the multiple forms of slavery that plagued African Americans. Within the historical moment of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment, the painting suggested that Brown set into motion the collapse of slavery, and indeed multiple forms of slavery, represented by the fused, yet double-bodied beast. As the timing and subject matter of the painting revealed, withholding the franchise from African Americans marked another form of slavery that prevented full democratic representation.

Douglass' created artwork that revealed his engagement with transnational issues concerning individuals of African descent in Cuba. Scholars have increasingly examined how people of African descent in the United States, Cuba, and Haiti "perceived themselves as bound to each other, whether politically, ideology, or otherwise."²⁰ Douglass' visual production reflects these connections. In an advertisement for Douglass' instruction in drawing and painting, he also called attention to two images – one of Cuba, the other of black Union soldiers – visible in his studio.²¹ He titled the first "Cuba must be free." Though the location of the image is unknown today, the title reflects that the subject matter of Douglass' drawing grappled with the ongoing realities of slavery and colonialism in Cuba. A group of Cuban, slave-owning planters had rebelled against the Spanish government in 1868 and

²⁰ Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo, *Black Cosmopolitanism, Racial Consciousness and Transnational Identity in the Nineteenth Century Americas* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2005), 30. See Christopher Schmidt-Nowara, *Empire and Slavery: Spain, Cuba, and Puerto Rico, 1833-1874* (Pittsburgh: Pittsburgh University Press, 1999) for more about Caribbean and transatlantic political coalitions, including antislavery campaigns.

²¹ "Douglass' Studio," *Christian Recorder*, April 2, 1870, 4.

emancipated their slaves only then to require legally dictated servitude of the newly freed people or conscript them as paramilitary combatants.²² As many African-descended Cubans moved between various degrees of freedom and enslavement, the *Christian Recorder* and many other newspapers in the United States followed closely. The title of “Cuba must go free” likely describes the visual arguments that Douglass crafted to condemn the enslavement of Cubans. Measuring 36 by 56 inches, the size and medium of the drawing suggest that it was more suited for public display than personal consumption in the home.

Douglass’ second drawing – “Dying for the Flag” – exhibited his involvement in the commemoration of African American Civil War veterans. He dedicated the drawing, which also measured 36 by 56 inches to a local chapter of the Grand Army of the Republic (GAR) post for African American veterans in Philadelphia, Post #27. Bound together by experiences of war as black soldiers, members of Post #27 met for many decades after the chapter’s founding to discuss their experiences of combat, build friendships, and commemorate their fallen brethren.²³ The title of the drawing underscores the sacrifices made by African American soldiers during the Civil War and invoked the massacre of black soldiers at Fort Pillow at the hands of Confederate forces. Two years before Douglass advertised his “Dying for the Flag” drawing, the commander-in-chief of the GAR, General John A. Logan, urged all Union veterans to decorate the graves of Civil War soldiers on Memorial Day.²⁴ Advertised less than two months before Memorial Day in 1870, Douglass’ image commemorated fallen Union soldiers in keeping with the pronouncement of General Logan and the recent practices of Union veterans. The sacrifice denoted in the title of Douglass’ drawing paralleled the

²² Rebecca J. Scott, “Gradual Abolition and the Dynamics of Slave Emancipation in Cuba, 1868-86,” *Hispanic American Historical Review* 63, no.3 (August 1983), 450-1.

²³ Barbara A. Gannon, “Sites of Memory, Sites of Glory: African-American Grand Army of the Republic Posts in Pennsylvania,” in *Making and Remaking Pennsylvania’s Civil War* eds. William Blair and William Pencak (State College, PA: Penn State University Press, 2012), 165-188.

²⁴ Blight, *Race and Reunion*, 71.

Memorial Day speeches in the North during which audiences heard that “[t]heir soldiers had died necessary deaths; they had saved the republic, and their blood had given the nation new life.”²⁵ The large size of “Dying for the Flag” suggests that it was created for public display; its size ensured that many would be able to see Douglass’ image if displayed ceremonially.



Figure 5-2. “Christus Consolator” by Art Scheffer. 1851.
Courtesy of the Minneapolis Institute of Arts.

The philosophy of religious instruction advocated by leaders in the African Methodist Episcopal Church embraced the didactic elements of Robert Douglass Jr.’s visual work. In October 1869, Douglass presented an ornate banner of a religious scene on behalf of the Sunday School of Asbury African Methodist Episcopal Church in Chester, Pennsylvania. Having been hired by the Church’s Sunday School Committee, Douglass painted the scene on

²⁵Ibid., 72.

blue silk. The front of the banner depicted Jesus at the center of the banner blessing young children that accompanied an inscription in gold letters “suffer little children to come unto me.” The author of the article wrote that “[t]he principal figured reminds me of [the painting] ‘Christus Consolator’ of Ary Scheffer” (see Figure 5-2) which depicted an enslaved man with outstretched, manacle-bound hands not unlike the image of the supplicant slave image engraved by Patrick Henry Reason. The author continued that Douglass had removed the enslaved figure and “introduced into the group upon this banner, in a circular composition, a colored mother and her child – which seems appropriately to illustrate the oneness of the human family.” Since black women primarily taught children at AME Sunday Schools, replacing the enslaved figure with an African American mother and child reflected the primary composition of these religious meetings. AME Sunday schools educated black children, trained black leaders, and inculcated religious and moral teachings – all goals of *Christian Recorder* editor, Benjamin Tanner, and objectives shared by other AME Church leaders. The banner publically celebrated black women’s contributions as individuals who nurtured the religious teachings of the AME Church.

The reception and audience of Douglass’ banner provide insight into the practices of seeing during the nineteenth century. The individual who documented the event underscored the circular composition of Douglass’ image to stress the equality of all the people, regardless of race, before the eyes of God. The literal distance of each person from Jesus corresponded to spiritual distance to Jesus. The viewer interpreted all the figures’ equal distance from Jesus as demonstrating that “[o]n this banner all appear as of one blood.” The attendee perceptively declared that “the principal light, which emanates from the halo surrounding [Christ’s] head... is somewhat Rembrandesque!” Such an interpretation required a studied knowledge of the

Dutch painter that would have been unavailable to most readers of the *Christian Recorder*. The inclusion of this reflection revealed the writer's expansive art historical knowledge while it also educated readers of the article about one of the defining characteristics of a seventeenth century Dutch master. Douglass' creation inspired the viewer to write excitedly that "I could also recognize in the painting a figure from Raphael – which, like an apt quotation in a literary effort, gives an additional charm to the composition."²⁶ Evidently, Douglass' artistic style sufficiently impressed one viewer and evoked the works of the European masters Rembrandt van Rijn and Raphael. Such sophisticated ways of looking at religious imagery communicated the visual vocabularies known to attendees at the dedication ceremony. Douglass transformed a rarified piece of art into a visual object that was widely accessible to children and a religious audience. At least one member of the audience created an intricate interpretation of Douglass' image which itself documented and praised the religious instruction at Asbury African Methodist Episcopal Church.

Douglass linked his racialized and religious imagery with the contributions of black soldiers during the Civil War. He delivered an address about the founders of the Sunday Schools, Robert Raikes and William Fox, as well as "the opposition they met with and how they triumphed."²⁷ He stressed the importance of preserving banners "without spot or blemish" before declaring that the Star Spangled Banner had "once been stained with the foul blot of slavery, but now by the valor of the white and colored 'Boys in Blue,' restored to its original brightness."²⁸ According to Douglass, African American soldiers' military service helped secure a Union victory, end slavery, and redeem the values attributed to the nation via

²⁶ Artifex, "Sunday-School Anniversary," *Christian Recorder*, November 6, 1869, 3.

²⁷ Ibid. For more about the founders of the Sunday schools, see John Carroll Power, *The Rise and Progress of Sunday Schools: A Biography of Robert Raikes and William Fox* (New York: Sheldon & Company, 1863).

²⁸ Artifex, "Sunday-School Anniversary," *Christian Recorder*, November 6, 1869, 3.

the proxy of the Star Spangled Banner. Furthermore, his words possessed a double meaning that urged his audience to maintain the physical appearance of banners and uphold the morals and philosophies that they represented. This included the Sunday School banner he presented that day before the congregants of the AME Church. As such, Douglass implied that those attending and teaching the Sunday school should practice the morals and principles inculcated by religious teachings.

Much as the *Christian Recorder* supported Douglass' work, Douglass advanced the educational and moralizing mission of the AME. Such an opportunity arose in 1876 when Philadelphia hosted the Centennial Exhibition which showcased innovations – artistic and otherwise – to millions of visitors. In addition to being a celebration of the one-hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Declaration of Independence, the Centennial Exhibition represented an attempt to prove the progress and achievements of the United States to foreign countries.²⁹ Douglass attended the 1876 Centennial Exhibition held in Philadelphia and, as a news correspondent for the *Christian Recorder*, published detailed reports of the Exhibition's galleries and artwork. He catalogued the various nationalities of the featured artists, but focused on the work of the African American artist, Edward M. Bannister. In what would become the painting that catapulted Bannister to international fame, "Under the Oaks" received high accolades from Douglass. He wrote that the painting showed "a quiet pastoral scene, a Shepherd and sheep beneath a fine group of oaks. It is much admired, and it gave me

²⁹ Linda P. Gross and Theresa R. Snyder, *Images of America: Philadelphia's 1876 Centennial Exhibition* (Chicago: Arcadia Press, 2005), 7. Scholars have also highlighted the mistreatment of African American attendees at the 1876 Centennial Exposition. See: Mitch Kachun, "Before the Eyes of All Nations: African-American Identity and Historical Memory at the Centennial Exposition of 1876," *Pennsylvania History* 65, no.3 (Summer 1998): 300-323; Kathleen Ann Clark, *Defining Moments: African American Commemoration and Political Culture in the South, 1863-1913* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina), 123; Philip S. Foner, "Black Participation in the Centennial of 1876," *Phylon* 39, no.4 (4th Quarter 1978): 283-296; Fitzhugh Brundage, "Meta Warrick's 1907 'Negro Tableaux' and (Re)Presenting African American Historical Memory," *Journal of American History* 89, no.4 (March 2004), 1374.

great pleasure to find that it is one of the really meritorious works that have gained a medal.”³⁰ The public recognition of Bannister’s painting as among the best to be displayed among international competitors physically embodied the elements of black talent and genius that Douglass championed. Douglass surely drew on his experience as an art student in London in 1840 where he studied and painted British master painters including John Constable when he reflected: “To me it recalls some of the best efforts of Constable, the great English Landscape painter.”³¹ By aligning Bannister’s work with a famous English painter, Douglass drew attention to the skill with which Bannister painted. Even if readers did not immediately recognize the name and significance of Constable, Douglass made this knowledge accessible to his readers by describing him as “*the* great English Landscape painter.”³² He also chose to mention that a panel of judges sufficiently admired Bannister’s work and that the painting evidently deserved an award for its expert rendering.

Douglass’ role as an art critic aligned with Rev. Benjamin Tanner’s promotion of African Americans’ participation in the Centennial Exposition. Long before the opening of the event, Tanner reasoned that the Centennial Exposition could offer African Americans the chance to exhibit their contributions to the nation and “the civilization of the world” in contrast to those who asserted that African Americans possessed “neither religion, history, government, or tradition.”³³ While a monument of Bishop Richard Allen served that purpose at the Centennial Exposition, so too did Douglass’ reviews of art testify to his intellectual capacity to both know and judge art. After walking around the enormous buildings filled with paintings and sculptures, Douglass described the environment for readers of the *Christian*

³⁰ Robert Douglass, “The Centennial Exhibition,” *Christian Recorder*, October 26, 1876, 8.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Emphasis mine.

³³ *Christian Recorder*, January 22, 1874 and *Christian Recorder*, March 5, 1874 as quoted in Kachun, “Before the Eyes of All Nations,” 311.

Recorder. His testimony echoed the goals of many African Americans who envisioned the Centennial Exhibition to be an opportunity to showcase black achievement in building and sustaining the nation.³⁴ Douglass dedicated a large portion of one of his reports to the statue of a slave created by the Milan artist, Buoninsegna. He described the statue and its effect on him – “pity and admiration are irresistibly excited” – after insisting that Buoninsegna’s statue, even devoid of whips and chains, “far surpass[ed]” Hiram Power’s famous statue of an enslaved Greek woman.³⁵ For the readers of the *Christian Recorder* who would not visit the statue in person, Douglass meticulously fashioned a vicarious experience of Buoninsegna’s statue in written form. “In our mind’s eye,” Douglass wrote, “we see the slave-market – We recognize the insolent domineering demeanor of the seller and the stolid sensual curiosity of the buyer.”³⁶ Addressing his readers directly, Douglass testified that “[y]ou can almost discern the blush upon the expressive countenance and the action” of the statue.³⁷ Describing several artworks in such detail provided readers with a vocabulary with which to describe and judge the art, taught them how they could see it within a historical moment, and perhaps compelled some readers to view it firsthand.

The *Christian Recorder* repeatedly showcased Douglass’ dedication to the educational attainment of black Philadelphians as well as his participation in its realization. In 1878, Robert Douglass acted as a librarian for the Union Library Association (ULA), which held meetings at the Mother Bethel AME Church.³⁸ Much like the Library Company of Colored People that he had founded with other black men in 1833, the ULA counted among its members “practical, professional and business men [who] have for their aim the formation of

³⁴ Philip S. Foner, “Black Participation in the Centennial of 1876,” *Phylon* 39, no.4 (Winter 1978): 283-296.

³⁵ R.D., “The Centennial Exhibition,” *Christian Recorder*, September 28, 1876, 1.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ *Ibid.*

³⁸ “Local Column,” *Christian Recorder*, February 14, 1878, 3.

a Library and Reading Room, the encouragement of co-operative enterprises, to stimulate persons of talent and genius, [and] to foster and to reciprocate race patronage.”³⁹ In other words, the church-supported ULA intended to foster African American business through education. The language of black “genius” echoed the language Douglass used to describe the talents of the musician Frank Johnson nearly four decades earlier. The *Christian Recorder* eagerly reported to its readers that Douglass presented a speech at the illustrious Philadelphia Academy of Music and gave a recitation of “The Lay of the Madman” in three languages that was described as a “fair specimen of dramatic art.”⁴⁰ Later that year, the *Christian Recorder* reported that Douglass “delivered his second lecture on Phonography, in the Hall of the Medical College” while “earnest attention and much interest was exhibited in the lucid demonstration.”⁴¹ The AME Church recognized Douglass’ contribution to African American educational attainment when it inducted him into the Historical and Literary Association of Mother Bethel AME Church in 1878.⁴² Such an honor was in keeping with AME efforts to sustain and commend those whose actions championed black education.

The AME Church’s national periodical, the *Christian Recorder*, also allowed Douglass to participate in ongoing debates about African Americans and Haiti.⁴³ During the late 1860s and early 1870s, talks of strengthening economic ties with Haiti and annexing Santo Domingo circulated in the United States Senate and engaged African Americans leaders such as Frederick Douglass who initially supported its annexation.⁴⁴ While not directly

³⁹ “Local Column,” *Christian Recorder*, February 21, 1878, 3.

⁴⁰ “Local Column,” *Christian Recorder*, January 24, 1878, 3.

⁴¹ Robert J. Holland, “Local Column,” *Christian Recorder*, June 20, 1878, 2.

⁴² “The Three-Fold Nature of Man,” *Christian Recorder*, April 25, 1878, 2.

⁴³ Among many African Americans, the prospect of Haiti as a country to flee the proliferating Black Codes, increased racialized violence, and the slow momentum of federal legal rights remained popular.

⁴⁴ Millery Polyné, *From Douglass to Duvalier: U.S. African Americans, Haiti, and Pan Americanism, 1870-1964* (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 2010), 25-55; Merline Pitre, “Frederick Douglass and the Annexation of Santo Domingo,” *Journal of Negro History* 62, no.4 (October 1977): 390-400; Daniel Brantley,

addressing the political realities of Haiti, Robert Douglass published an article that enumerated two reasons for his submission of a translation of a Haitian newspaper article. What began as a romanticized retelling of President Salnave's overthrow of President Geffrard ended with Douglass reporting to readers that President Salnave "tore in pieces the [Haitian] Constitution" and "vomited death upon the population of our sea-board" to maintain his despotic rule.⁴⁵ Douglass, and by extension the *Recorder*, which published the translation, offered readers glimpses into some of the realities of Haitian life in early 1870. According to Douglass' translation, U.S. plans to establish economic partnerships with Haitian businesses and annex part of the island it occupied looked grim indeed considering the destruction left in the wake of civil war.

Douglass' published translation of Salnave's trial primarily addressed domestic Haitian politics to educate African American readers of the *Christian Recorder*. First, he wrote, "there is so little known of the true character of Sylvain Salnave, late President of Haiti, in this country, that I have translated from 'le Moniteur' (the official Journal of the Republic)... a portion of his trial."⁴⁶ In contrast, many black men and women knew much about Toussaint L'Ouverture as they had made extensive use of his image and life story during the Civil War for their own purposes.⁴⁷ Douglass' second justification for translating the article for publication was a way to let Haitians voice their own opinions: "From it we may learn what Haitians themselves thought of their late ruler."⁴⁸ Douglass used his translation to elucidate the political viewpoint of the periodical he translated for the benefit of

Black Diplomacy and Frederick Douglass' Caribbean Experiences, 1871 and 1889-1891: The Untold Story," *Phylon* 45, no.3 (Fall 1984): 197-209; Rayford W. Logan, *Haiti and the Dominican Republic* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1968).

⁴⁵ "Salnave," *Christian Recorder*, February 19, 1870, 1.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Matthew Clavin, *Toussaint Louverture and the American Civil War: The Promise and Peril of a Second Haitian Revolution* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), 78, 81, 86, 94.

⁴⁸ "Salnave," *Christian Recorder*, February 19, 1870, 1.

the *Recorder's* African American readers. The translation fulfilled the goals of editor Benjamin Tanner to cultivate African American education by keeping the readers of the *Recorder* well-informed of Haitian history according to the words of Haitians themselves.

Douglass' published reports revealed how his opinions of Haitian politicians diverged from those of the *Christian Recorder's* editor. In 1877, the *Christian Recorder* printed Douglass' translation of an article from the Haitian newspaper, *La Peuple*, which included a report on a voyage of a former President of Haiti, Nissage Saget. The article commended him for stepping down from office upon his retirement from the country's political office.⁴⁹ In the same issue, a letter to the editor exhorted that a successful missionary trip to Haiti must include a leader who is "a thorough scholar as a Theologian," fluent in French, and a gentleman.⁵⁰ Editor Tanner responded to both Douglass' translation and this letter to the editor with sneering sarcasm: "[t]he mistake made by both these contributors... is that in Hayti, there are none but the technical 'perfect gentleman;' that all are 'thorough scholars and theologians,' and that nothing but the purest French is spoke."⁵¹ Tanner continued: "Our Church, however, has the idea that in Hayti, as in other countries, there are those having souls to save, who have not the polish, the culture and the sweet rounding off, so lavishly credited to them by our two correspondents. We have the opinion that it is possible, there, as elsewhere to stumble across a sinner in the rough, and as Methodism has chiefly concerned herself about such, wherever it has gone, it proposes doing the same in Hayti."⁵² Tanner pinpointed Douglass' romanticized notion of Haitian politics since Douglass had glossed over the violent dictatorship, political overthrow, and civil war that plagued the country. The death and

⁴⁹ "The Ex-President at Home," *Christian Recorder*, February 8, 1877, 8.

⁵⁰ "In Regard to Hayti," *Christian Recorder*, February 1, 1877, 4.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

destruction wrought by civil war in Haiti made no appearance in Douglass' translation of the calm retreat of Saget to his hometown.

Douglass' position as a widely respected, educated black Philadelphian engaged in the AME community provided him with a favored position to articulate that which he believed to be important. Reverend Tanner published an editorial in the *Christian Recorder* that praised Douglass as "a great admirer of the Haytian people, having spent some years among them, and knowing possibly more of them, than any colored American in the land."⁵³ He also thanked Douglass for the Haitian coffee that he gifted to the staff at the *Christian Recorder*. Douglass' cultural knowledge was so great and his political sensibilities so strong that the Tanner "wish[ed] that Mr. Douglass would overcome somewhat of [sic] his native modesty and come more within reach of the powers that be." More to the point, Tanner continued: "[A] master of the French and Spanish [languages], he would make a capital consul for some South American post."⁵⁴ Tanner believed Douglass to possess the language skills as well as the cultural knowledge pursuant a diplomat to a foreign country. The AME Church had established its presence in South America more than forty years before Tanner penned his praise of Douglass. Yet, he also chided Douglass' "native modesty" which would need to be overcome if he wanted such a position. Such an assignment was not limited to exceptionally prominent individuals; only three years earlier, Charles S. Douglass, a son of Frederick Douglass, had recently traveled to Puerta Plata, Santo Domingo as the United States Consul.⁵⁵ It is also possible that Tanner envisioned Douglass to continue his work with the AME

⁵³ "To Robert Douglass, Esq.," *Christian Recorder*, July 18, 1878, 2.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁵⁵ "Personal Items," *Christian Recorder*, July 15, 1875, 4.

Church within the South American continent, given the Church's recent expansion in South America after it began appealing to converts in Spanish instead of only English.⁵⁶

An examination of Robert Douglass' production of visual culture highlighted his participation in other debates concerning African Americans during the Reconstruction era. His works addressed African American men's voting rights, the disputed future of Cuba, sacrifices made by Union veterans, and the role of women in the AME Church. The didactic qualities of the visual culture crafted by Douglass overlapped with the philosophies of religious instruction advocated by leaders in the African Methodist Episcopal Church. Indeed, they honored and publically recognized Douglass' like-minded dedication to the educational attainment of black Philadelphians. Investigating the intended audiences and viewer reception of these images further elucidates the practices of seeing exercised during the nineteenth century. In doing so, it becomes apparent that Douglass produced visual work that illuminated the intersection of religion and politics during Reconstruction.

JAMES PRESLEY BALL SR., THE BUSINESS OF SPECTACLE, AND THE AME CHURCH

Like Robert Douglass Jr., James Presley Ball Sr. established connections with the AME Church and its religious leadership that benefitted his photographic business after the Civil War. In fact, Ball owed much of his success to the AME Church and joined several of its black leaders in political ventures in the South during Reconstruction. While Douglass produced visual material as his primary method of generating income, Ball exercised a more diversified approach to entrepreneurship. His involvement in a legal case involving Blind Tom revealed that his business strategies extended beyond his photographic ventures. By investigating his commercial exploits and his participation in political events together, we see

⁵⁶ Bishop Foster, "Methodism," *Christian Recorder*, January 22, 1874, 6.

how J.P. Ball Sr. addressed religious and secular African American politics during the Reconstruction era.

Ball's involvement in a lawsuit over the legal guardianship of the eminent African American musician, "Blind Tom" Wiggins demonstrated the lengths to which Ball sought professional success. Scholar Geneva Southall has consistently argued that Tom's guardians financially exploited both the musician and his family throughout Tom's life and kept him in a state of neo-slavery.⁵⁷ This treatment of Tom made its way into a Cincinnati courtroom wherein two parties vied for the legal guardianship of Tom in 1865. Born into slavery in 1849, Tom and his parents lived in Columbus, Georgia after James Bethune purchased them. After discovering Tom's uncanny ability to memorize and improvise songs played on the piano, Bethune capitalized on Tom's talents. He began exhibiting young Tom and his musical prowess to enraptured audiences and entrusted him to concert promoter Perry Oliver for increasing Tom's public exposure for the sake of profit. Under Oliver's direction, Tom played hundreds of concerts throughout the North and South before, during, and after the Civil War. After the issuance of the Emancipation Proclamation, Bethune convinced Tom's parents to indenture him to Bethune until the age of 21. According to a report of the trial testimony, Bethune claimed that Tom's parents feared that harm would come to Tom after emancipation and purportedly volunteered to indenture Tom to Bethune.⁵⁸ In return, Bethune offered Tom's

⁵⁷ Geneva Handy Southall, *Blind Tom, the Black Pianist-Composer, 1849-1908, Continually Enslaved* (Lanham, Maryland: Scarecrow Press, 2002); Geneva Handy Southall, *Blind Tom: The Post-Civil War Enslavement of a Black Musical Genius* (Minneapolis: Challenge Productions, 1978). See also: Deidre O'Connell, *The Ballad of Blind Tom, Slave Pianist* (New York: Overlook Hardcover, 2009). Scholars of disability studies have also pointed to business managers taking advantage of Tom. See: Terry Rowden, *The Songs of Blind Folk: African American Musicians and the Culture of Blindness* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009) & Christopher Krentz, "A 'Vacant Receptacle'? Blind Tom, Cognitive Difference, and Pedagogy," *PMLA* 120, no.2 (March 2005): 552-557. Other scholars have concentrated on his contributions to musical performance culture in the late nineteenth century. See: Thomas L. Riis, "The Experience and Impact of Black Entertainers in England, 1895-1920," *American Music* 4, no.1 (Spring 1986): 50-58.

⁵⁸ "Blind Tom in Court," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, July 21, 1865, 3.

parents the use of a small tract of his property for the entirety of their lives but stopped short of legally deeding them the land.⁵⁹ Furthermore, the report continued, they would receive \$500 a year and Tom would receive a salary of \$20 a month and ten percent of his performances' net earnings.⁶⁰

James Presley Ball Sr. sought to benefit financially from Tom Wiggins' musical talents. In June 1865, soon after the close of the Civil War, Ball and another black Ohioan, Tabbs Gross, traveled to Columbus, Georgia and proposed to invest in a portion of Tom's management.⁶¹ They agreed to pay \$20,000 in gold for a half interest for five years - \$1,000 cash, \$4,000 in ten days, \$5,000 in six months, and the balance in eighteen months."⁶² Bethune agreed to the deal but Gross did not deliver the entirety of the first two deposits.⁶³ Bethune then claimed the contract had been broken and was therefore void. Bethune busily toured Tom throughout the Midwest and when he arrived in Cincinnati, Ball, Gross, and several other African American men challenged Bethune's legal custody over Tom. Gross applied for legal guardianship over Tom in New Albany, Indiana on the grounds that Bethune held Tom in illegal restraint. Gross later served Bethune a writ of *habeas corpus* in Cincinnati. While under examination, Tabbs Gross testified that both parties – Gross and Bethune – agreed that Gross would adopt Tom in Cincinnati as his own son.⁶⁴ J.P. Ball took the stand and corroborated this information.⁶⁵ Bethune's testimony differed when he claimed that Gross did not make a request to transfer guardianship of Tom to Gross.⁶⁶

⁵⁹ Ibid.

⁶⁰ "Local News," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, July 22, 1865, 3.

⁶¹ The current historiography does not mention Ball playing any part in Tom's trial, though the historical record proves otherwise.

⁶² "Blind Tom in Court," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, July 21, 1865, 3.

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ "Local News," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, July 22, 1865, 3.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ "Blind Tom in Court," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, July 21, 1865, 3.

What began as a business proposition morphed into a lawsuit to free Blind Tom from Turner's legal guardianship, or what the plaintiffs believed to be slavery by another name. Bethune rebuked charges that he supported slavery, though he conceded in court: "I put my defense of slavery entirely on the ground that the slaves were in a better condition than the whole world could have put on them, but the Government says that there shall not be slavery, and I am satisfied."⁶⁷ The case became more complicated when, before the crowded courtroom, an African American man named Isaac Turner testified to the liminal freedoms enjoyed by formerly enslaved people on and near the Bethune estate. Turner visited and spoke to Tom's parents in Columbus, Georgia. There, he witnessed Tom's mother, Charity, remind her husband, Mingo, that he needed a pass in order to travel after the declaration of the Emancipation Proclamation.⁶⁸ Mingo later asked Turner if African Americans were indeed free from slavery and Mingo mentioned that he did not understand the contract he signed with Bethune that indentured his son, Tom. Most germane to the case, Turner testified that Tom's father admitted to not fully understanding the contract indenturing Tom to Bethune until the age of 21. Despite this testimony, the parties did not raise the issue of the legality of the underlying indentured servitude contract and the judge did not *sua sponte* question the validity of the underlying agreement that formed the basis of the litigation between Bethune and Gross. After hearing the testimony of doctors who examined Tom, discerning no evidence of unkind treatment shown by Bethune, asking Tom whom he wished to care for him, and determining that Gross had no grounds for legal guardianship of Tom because he was not a

⁶⁷ Ibid.

⁶⁸ Historians have pointed to the disjointed adherence to the Emancipation Proclamation throughout the South and have repeatedly shown that little to no enforcement of the Proclamation existed in many areas of the South, even long after the end of the Civil War. See: Louis P. Masur, *Lincoln's Hundred Days: The Emancipation Proclamation and the War for Union* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), William A. Blair and Karen Fisher Younger eds., *Lincoln's Proclamation: Emancipation Reconsidered* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009).

resident of the state where Gross filed for a writ of *habeas corpus*, Judge Woodruff decided in favor of Bethune,⁶⁹ who resumed touring Tom for many more decades.⁷⁰

The repercussions of the lawsuit indelibly shaped the trajectory of James Presley Ball's photographic business. Isaac Turner, the African American man who had traveled to Georgia to speak with Tom Wiggins' parents, sued Ball and Gross. The lawsuit revealed more information about the previous suit brought by Tabbs Gross against Bethune. Ball testified that Gross came to his gallery and proposed plans to invest in a Blind Tom business venture. The group of African American men then traveled to Georgia to find Tom but they first encountered Bethune and entered into a contract with him. According to Ball, Turner attempted to entice Tom to run away, and after Bethune discovered this, Bethune threatened to shoot Turner.⁷¹ Isaac Turner fronted the \$1,000 that served as the down payment to Bethune, and after he broke the contract with the group, Turner claimed to have not been repaid his \$1,000.⁷² The legal proceedings against Ball dragged on for nearly two years before the court decided in favor of Turner. Ball's lack of funds became evident when he claimed the benefits of the Homestead Act, which allowed heads of families who did not own homesteads to exempt three hundred dollars from legal execution. Having recently been divorced from his wife in July of 1867,⁷³ Ball was not recognized to be the head of household. The court granted him the benefit of the Act because he paid spousal alimony and financially supported two

⁶⁹ "Blind Tom," *Evening Post* (New York, NY), July 27, 1865, 4.

⁷⁰ In 1870, with his father recently deceased and his mother living in Georgia, Tom neared his twenty-first birthday – the end of his term of indenture. Bethune traveled with Tom to a Virginia probate judge who declared Tom mentally incompetent and then named Bethune his legal guardian. Such a decision contrasted with Tom having been deemed competent enough by Judge Woodruff in Cincinnati to select the person he wanted to be his legal guardian in 1865. Bethune then resumed promoting and touring Tom. For more, see: Southall, *Blind Tom, the Black Pianist-Composer, 1849-1908* & O'Connell, *The Ballad of Blind Tom, Slave Pianist*; "Blind Tom" entry in Henry Louis Gates and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, eds., *African American Lives* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 85.

⁷¹ "City News. Law Report," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, January 18, 1866, 3 & "Law Report," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, January 18, 1866, 1.

⁷² *Ibid.*

⁷³ "Court Affairs," July 3, 1867, *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, July 3, 1867, 1.

children after his youngest child, Robert, had passed away at the age of five in September of 1866.⁷⁴ Ball's precarious financial situation became clearer when on January 10, 1868, under order of the Sheriff of Hamilton County, the possessions held in Ball's West Fourth Street gallery – chairs, paintings, mirrors, and more – were sold to pay the damages of the Turner case. Advertisements invited members of the public to bring cash to purchase the items.⁷⁵ As an enterprising businessman, lawsuits and bankruptcy did not prevent Ball from trying his luck again.

Ball's weak financial situation did not deter him from exhibiting strength in his continued advocacy for the success of African American youth and their educational institutions. At nearly the same time that Gross brought Bethune to court over the guardianship of Tom Wiggins, J.P. Ball supported the musical education of Ella Shepherd, another teenager born into slavery. After the death of her father and a lawsuit left her and her mother without any possessions, J.P. Ball offered to pay for the music lessons that Ella had commenced before her father's death. Ball offered to pay for her instruction, as it was part of her professional training. Though his financial aid lasted only a few months due to his changing fiscal circumstances, Ball supported Ella immediately before she secured a position at a Gallatin, Tennessee school prior to enrolling in Fisk University.⁷⁶

Another African American woman hinted at Ball's involvement in African American education. Writing from New York City, Elizabeth Keckley wrote to AME Bishop Daniel Payne on January 1, 1868 that she had entrusted Ball with a number of "sacred relics" belonging to former First Lady, Mary Todd Lincoln. Among these were the bonnet and

⁷⁴ "Law Report," *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, December 25, 1867, 2; "Died," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, September 26, 1866, 2.

⁷⁵ "Sheriff's Sale," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, January 4, 1868, 4.

⁷⁶ John Blassingame, ed., *Slave Testimony: Two Centuries of Letters, Speeches, Interviews, and Autobiographies* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1977), 611-614. See also Booker T. Washington, *The Story of the Negro: The Rise of the Race from Slavery, Vol. II* (New York: Association Press, 1909), 267-269.

bloodstained cloak worn by Mrs. Lincoln on the night of her husband's assassination. She donated the items via Ball, who was also an agent for Wilberforce College. She wished that Payne or others would exhibit the items for the benefit of Wilberforce which had suffered a disastrous fire in 1865. Keckley, whose son had attended Wilberforce, donated the items "for the cause of educating the four millions of slaves liberated by our President."⁷⁷ While acting as an agent for Wilberforce, Ball sent his son, James Presley Ball Jr., to the prestigious Boston Public Latin School in 1866 and later to the exclusive Phillips Academy in Andover, Massachusetts in 1869.⁷⁸

J.P. Ball Sr.'s engagement in civic activities provided training for his development as a black elected official. In the spring of 1867, Ball served as a vice president for the Lincoln Memorial Club, an organization led by African American men who gathered to commemorate Abraham Lincoln on the anniversary of his death. Students from the recently established all-black Gaines High School sang songs before several black men gave speeches about the character and legacy of President Lincoln. One W.H. Parham eulogized Abraham Lincoln, the white abolitionist printer Elijah Lovejoy, and the rebellious John Brown all in the same speech.⁷⁹ At a subsequent annual meeting, J.P. Ball's peers elected him to serve as the librarian of the Lincoln Memorial Club.⁸⁰ Toasting Lincoln and his memory, the group celebrated the 15th Amendment, which had been ratified less than two weeks before the gathering. A prominent black Cincinnati, Peter H. Clark, described the Amendment at the meeting as "the guarantee of liberty, the cap-stone of the Republic – Its adoption fills our

⁷⁷ Elizabeth Keckley, *Behind the Scenes, or Thirty Years a Slave and Four Years in the White House* (New York: G.W. Carleton & Co. Publishers, 1868), 367.

⁷⁸ *Catalogue of Phillips Academy, Andover, Mass., June 1869* (Andover: Warren F. Draper, 1869), 11 & *Catalogue of the Boston Public Latin School, established in 1635 with an historical sketch prepared by Henry F. Jenks* (Boston: The Boston Latin School Association, 1886), 332.

⁷⁹ "Anniversary of the Assassination," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, April 16, 1867, 2.

⁸⁰ "Lincoln Memorial Club – Banquet Saturday Evening," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, February 14, 1870, 1.

hearts with bright anticipation for our children, hearty good will for our fellow-citizens of all classes....”⁸¹ Like in years past, the group offered toasts and then joined together in a rendition of the John Brown song and adjourned its meeting.⁸² The commemoration of John Brown among Ball and the members of the Lincoln Memorial Club paralleled Robert Douglass Jr.’s painting that memorialized Brown “destroying American Slavery in the shape of a monster half man and half dragon.”⁸³

The simultaneous celebration of the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment and the visit of the first black senator, Hiram R. Revels, to Cincinnati provided Ball with another opportunity to ply his trade and advance his political education. It also revealed the Ball’s relationship to AME Church leaders and set the stage for his decision to seek office in Mississippi. Not actively preaching during his Congressional term, Senator Revels was a minister in the AME Church who had preached throughout the South and led a congregation in Baltimore before becoming a United States Senator. In the summer of 1870, he visited Cincinnati and gave a speech to approximately 400 individuals in which he urged his mostly African American audience to invest in the primary and collegiate education of their children, keep abreast of political and social developments, and vote for the Republican Party. J.P. Ball held a reception at his gallery in Revels’ honor.⁸⁴ Earlier that day, Senator Revels sat for photographs in Ball’s gallery, some of which featured him in the regalia of the Independent Order of Odd Fellows.⁸⁵ On July 14, several months after the adoption of the Fifteenth Amendment, Senator Revels and several other African American men, including Ball, joined approximately one thousand African Americans from cities on either side of the Ohio River –

⁸¹ Ibid.

⁸² Ibid.

⁸³ “Brief Editorials,” *Christian Recorder*, April 16, 1870, 2.

⁸⁴ “The Tendency of Our Age,” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, July 12, 1870, 2.

⁸⁵ Ibid.

the demarcation between a slave state and a free state – to celebrate the ratification of the Fifteenth Amendment. Joined by a band, they marched through the main streets of Covington and Newport, Kentucky. Several men offered speeches that stressed the importance of black children’s education, black men’s responsibility to vote Republican, and everyone’s necessity to be industrious and frugal.⁸⁶ A few days later, Ball advertised his *cartes de visite* of Senator Revels for 25 cents each as being an excellent “likeness and a work of art.”⁸⁷

Ball’s creation of the *cartes de visite* of Senator Revels overlapped with AME Church leaders’ broader goal to increase the visibility of black politicians. In a recurring column published in the *Christian Recorder*, the Reverend Theophilus Gould Steward countered “the charges of *indolence, slovenliness and immorality*” made by white Americans directed at African Americans by pointing to the collection and display of images.⁸⁸ He related a story of his visit to the home of an African American woman in an unnamed city. Having entered her home smelling of soap, Reverend Steward looked around the front room of the modest home. He immediately noticed the pictures – “What a lot of them. Here is John Brown, Charles Sumner, Abraham Lincoln, Bishop Allen, and who else? For they are all pictures of men.”⁸⁹ He then asked: “Have you no pictures of other public men? The colored congressmen for instance?” which prompted the woman to answer enthusiastically in the affirmative before opening her bedroom door to display “five colored congressmen on a sheet about ten by eighteen hung up in the cheapest of frames; the whoel [sic] cost perhaps twenty-five cents, and here lying on the washstand rolled up is the cheap lithograph of another ‘great man.’”⁹⁰ To Reverend Steward, the woman’s practice of displaying images of black politicians should

⁸⁶ “Newport,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, July 15, 1870, 7.

⁸⁷ “Home News,” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, July 21, 1870, 2; “Wants – Miscellaneous,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, July 18, 1870, 3.

⁸⁸ Theophilus Gould Steward, “Colored Society,” *Christian Recorder*, January 11, 1877, 8. Emphasis in original.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*

have been more common among African Americans. Such a practice, argued Steward, demonstrated African Americans' engaged political consciousness and testified to their moral citizenship.

In advocating for the collection of images depicting African American leaders, the *Christian Recorder* underscored the perception that such images remained inaccessible to some of their readers.⁹¹ In response to Reverend Steward's published piece regarding the collection of images of black politicians, the *Christian Recorder* published a letter by one Joseph Henry Lee from Albany, Georgia who lamented the availability of images of prominent black men. "Not upon the walls of Hampton only, but upon our own walls, also in our parlors, drawing-rooms and our sanctum," Lee insisted, "ought to be found the likeness of all our great men..."⁹² He list of those whose likenesses he wished to see included Governor P.B.S. Pinchback, the Reverend Henry McNeal Turner, Crispus Attucks, and Prince Hall. Lee explained that "the greatest reason" for the paucity of images of prominent African Americans was "because we don't know where, and through whom to get them. It is true, those of us who are fortunate enough to be a relative or an intimate friend may have them," Lee continued, "but what are the hundreds and thousands of us, who have never beheld the faces of our great men that we read of and roll their names upon our tongues as household words to do?"⁹³ African Americans, Lee posited, were fluent with the names and deeds of prominent black leaders but had difficulty procuring their likenesses. His article revealed the communal practices of viewing images of black leaders when he implied that visitors to the homes of relatives or friends viewed their images, such as Steward observing the images in the bedroom and front room of a woman's house. Some African Americans did not possess images not for

⁹¹ Joseph Henry Lee, "Pictures of our Prominent Men," *Christian Recorder*, June 13, 1878, 1.

⁹² Ibid.

⁹³ Ibid.

lack of want either; Lee anticipated “a ready sale for” images of prominent black leaders, past and present, and would eagerly replace the images that currently hung his own walls “if only I knew where to get them.”⁹⁴ While some of these images appeared in illustrated newspapers, especially those of recently elected black officeholders, others like Attucks and Hall were more difficult to obtain.⁹⁵

New business developments and Ball’s recent election to the Colored Republican Rallying Committee heightened his photographic business and political profile. By September of 1869, James Presley Ball Jr. had returned to Cincinnati from his Massachusetts boarding school to become a business associate of his father, Ball Sr. Having moved from the 30 West Fourth Street gallery to his new 160 Fourth Street storefront, the newly incorporated and named Ball & Son reentered the photography business in Cincinnati in the wake of the lawsuit that nearly bankrupted Ball Sr.⁹⁶ No doubt recovering from this financial setback, Ball Sr. relied on his skills, experience, and a lofty moniker – “the Great Original” – to advertise his new gallery.⁹⁷ In an appeal to a diverse Cincinnati audience composed of those with both Northern and Southern political sensibilities, Ball claimed in one advertisement that “[t]he 19th century has produced but one Henry Clay, but one Daniel Webster, and but one J.P. Ball the Great Original.”⁹⁸ Offering for sale ferretypes and *cartes de visite* for \$2 a dozen, Ball attracted enough customers to have accumulated \$1,500 worth of personal wealth according to the 1870 Census.⁹⁹ Living in the fourteenth ward of Cincinnati, Ball represented his district

⁹⁴ Ibid.

⁹⁵ For example, a portrait of Senator Hiram R. Revels can be found in *Harper’s Weekly*, February 19, 1870, 122.

⁹⁶ “Picture Gallery,” *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, September 9, 1869, 2.

⁹⁷ “Wants – Miscellaneous,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, September 12, 1869, 3.

⁹⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁹ 1850 United State Census (Free Schedule), Pitt Township, Wyandot County, Ohio; p. 233, family 86, dwelling 79, lines 967-977; June 1, 1850; National Archives Microfilm M-19, Roll 719.

along with two other African American men who had been elected to the Colored Republican Rallying Committee and charged to motivate black men to vote.¹⁰⁰

Ball's participation in the Colored Republican Rallying Committee trained him in the art of canvassing for votes and elucidated his strategic political philosophy. The aim of the organization was to make a list of all the black men who were eligible to vote in each ward, provide them with electoral information, and convince them to vote for Republican candidates. At one of the meetings of the Committee, a debate erupted when attendees disputed which individuals it should delegate to the task of enumerating and persuading those eligible to cast ballots. J.P. Ball voiced his opinion that the individual who could persuade the most black men to vote should be offered the job, even if the man's character was not without reproach. Of special interest to the group was the consumption of alcohol. Ball laid out his beliefs that expressed his support of an individual, even if he consumed alcohol; after all, the "object was to get all the colored votes polled, and to have all the voters support the Republican ticket."¹⁰¹ Ball's explanation reveals his results-driven approach to electoral politics and his fervent support of the Republican Party.

Ball's career as a photographer benefitted his later move into Southern electoral politics. It is unclear what prompted Ball's decision to move to Mississippi though it came soon after he met with the black senator from Mississippi, Hiram Revels. The Cincinnati City Directory of 1871 showed that J.P. Ball Sr. claimed his residence as Greenville, Mississippi while his son continued to live in Cincinnati and operate the Ball & Son gallery.¹⁰² It became clear, however, that Ball Sr. did not remain in Greenville for very long since a Cincinnati newspaper reported that Ball Sr. "resided – that is to say, has been on wheels – in the

¹⁰⁰ "Home News," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, April 2, 1870, 1.

¹⁰¹ "The Colored Voters' Association," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, August 9, 1870, 2.

¹⁰² *Gopsill's Cincinnati City Directory of 1871* (Cincinnati: James Gopsill & Sons, 1871),

sovereign State of Mississippi for nearly six months, and is about to run for Congress.”¹⁰³ Instead of dedicating all of his energies to his political campaigning, Ball maintained his career as a photographer. “His perambulating photographic institution,” the Cincinnati newspaper continued, “enables him to canvas the State and attend to business at the same time.”¹⁰⁴ His status as an itinerant photographer in Mississippi recalled the beginning of his career when he traveled around Virginia, Ohio, and Pennsylvania creating photographs of subjects. Photographs acted as a souvenir and a reminder that Ball had visited an individual who might potentially vote for him. His peripatetic business allowed Ball to connect in an intimate way with his sitters who undoubtedly conversed with the photographer over lighting, pose, and other elements of their photographic experience. He could sit with those that he photographed, spend time with them, and leave them with something that they desired or needed. The images that he left with individuals were something collectible, accessible, tangible, and memorable – a physical object representing an experience that lent itself perfectly to the goals of an aspiring politician.

Ball’s relationships with AME Church officials, his entrance into Southern politics, and his photography business demonstrate how visual culture played into Reconstruction politics. While ill-wishing white Mississippians surely labeled Ball a “carpetbagger” seeking to take advantage of the African American electorate for his own political gain. It is true that Ball sought financial gain by traveling to and residing in the South, a fact representative of many ambitious, educated, and talented Northerners who moved to the South during Reconstruction.¹⁰⁵ Yet, his connections with the AME church should not be surprising.

¹⁰³ “J.P. Ball,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, March 11, 1872, 4.

¹⁰⁴ Ibid.

¹⁰⁵ Eric Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (New York: Harper & Row), 294 – 296.

According to the historian Steven Hahn, AME Church leaders played an important role in the development of black Reconstruction politics because “they could mix spiritual and political messages in a fashion that resonated powerfully in the rural districts, and because their religious affiliations offered some cover in intensely hostile environments.”¹⁰⁶ As AME Reverend James D. Lynch declared, “I commence as a preacher and end as a political speaker.”¹⁰⁷ Similarly, Ball commenced as a photographer and became a Reconstruction politician.

Ball crafted a visual cultural record of the achievements of black religious leaders in the Reconstruction South. When the Reverend James D. Lynch, a prominent AME Church leader visited Cincinnati in 1866, he sat for a portrait in Ball’s studio.¹⁰⁸ Lynch had heeded the call of Bishop Payne to minister to formerly enslaved people in the South where he preached, established schools for black children, and soon entered Republican Party politics.¹⁰⁹ Scholars have shown the Reverend Lynch to be an outspoken, and at times daring, advocate of black education and voting rights for black men during Reconstruction.¹¹⁰ Historians have

¹⁰⁶ Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South from Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2003), 178.

¹⁰⁷ James D. Lynch to Dear Sir, July 9, 1867 in *Hayes Historical Journal* 6 (1986): 30 as cited in Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 178.

¹⁰⁸ Lynch was one of the most prominent black AME leaders in Mississippi and founded the *Canton Citizen* in 1870. See Julius Eric Thompson, *Black Life in Mississippi: Essays on Political, Social, and Cultural Studies in a Deep South State* (University Press of America, 2001), 14 & George Alexander Sewell, *Mississippi Black History Makers* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 1977), 38-48 for more information about him.

¹⁰⁹ Wesley J. Gaines, *African Methodism in the South or Twenty-Five Years of Freedom* (Atlanta: Franklin Publishing House, 1890), 1-9; Charles Spencer Smith, *A History of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the AME Church, 1922), 45-73; Benjamin Tucker Tanner, *An Apology for African Methodism* (Baltimore: no press named, 1867), 38. Richard R. Wright Jr., ed., *Centennial Encyclopaedia of the African Methodist Episcopal Church* (Philadelphia: Book Concern of the AME Church, 1916), 312-319.

¹¹⁰ Leon F. Litwack, *Been in the Storm So Long: The Aftermath of Slavery* (New York: Vintage Books, 1980), 511; Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction* (New York: Knopf, 2005), 88; Sewell, *Mississippi Black History Makers*, 38-48. Lynch also pushed back against the more racially separatist politics advanced by the AME Church. See William E. Montgomery, *Under Their Own Vine and Fig Tree: The African-American Church in the South* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State Press, 1994), 240-1. For a broader discussion of the AME Church’s separatist racial politics, see Clarence E. Walker, *A Rock in A Weary Land: The African Methodist Episcopal Church during the Civil War and Reconstruction* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State University Press, 1982).

stressed how large numbers of black religious leaders like the Reverend Lynch became officeholders in the South.¹¹¹ Ball captured “large sized likenesses of him, and presented fifteen or twenty copies, to be sold for the benefit of the *Recorder*: they went like hot cakes, and they may be seen adorning the parlors of many of our best citizens.”¹¹² Their quick sale underscored the popularity of Rev. Lynch as well as a widespread desire to possess his likeness. Ball’s decision to sell them and donate the proceeds of the sale to the *Christian Recorder* revealed his cooperation with the AME Church. The Church benefitted by earning money from the images during its rapid expansion throughout the South among newly free people. Furthermore, the images became mementos by which to remember the actions of one of the AME Church’s most successful ministers preaching in the South.

Ball’s photography of AME Church leaders underscored the importance of images in documenting the Church’s rapid growth. AME Churches sometimes featured images as an important component to their religious spaces. For example, the Warren AME Church in Toledo, Ohio featured in the rear of its pulpit photographs of its previous pastors “on either side of an admirable likeness of Abraham Lincoln.” During religious services, these images reminded congregants of the historical people and events that shaped the present realities they experienced inside and outside their house of worship. Furthermore, “[t]he walls of the basement” of the chapel, which seated approximately 300 people, “are adorned with pictures and mottoes.”¹¹³ In late 1870, when Ball “[was] on a “Southern tour” and “purposing to meet a number of our Southern conferences,” he took a “fine picture of the [members] of the

¹¹¹ Eric Foner, “‘The Tocsin of Freedom’: The Black Leadership of Reconstruction” in *Slavery, Resistance, and Freedom* eds. Gabor Boritt and Scott Hancock (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), 128.

¹¹² H.J. Young, “Cincinnati Correspondence,” *Christian Recorder*, November 24, 1866, 1.

¹¹³ R.G.M., “Word from Toledo,” *Christian Recorder*, October 25, 1877, 1.

Conference” in Greenville, Mississippi.¹¹⁴ “His praise,” the author continued, “is in the face of all whose pictures he takes.”¹¹⁵ Several years later, at the West Texas Annual Conference of the AME Church in Brenham, Texas, J.P. Ball took the portraits of all conference attendees.¹¹⁶ He also displayed a panorama, not his well-known 1855 panorama showing the ills of Africans’ enslavement, but one fashioned to represent “prominent incidents of Holy Writ.”¹¹⁷ Ball used his visual skillset to benefit the religious aims of the conference while also commemorating the event with visual souvenirs.

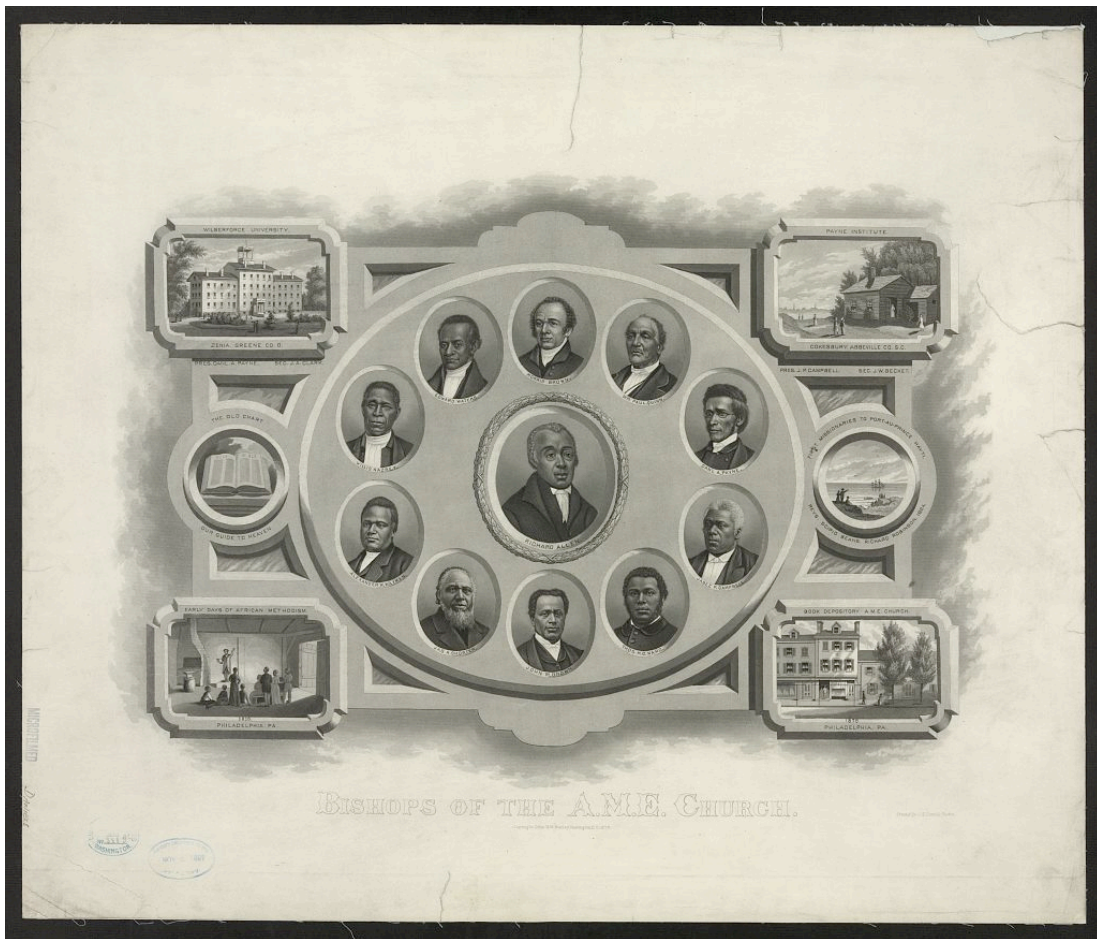


Figure 5-3. “Bishops of the AME Church” Lithograph by J.H. Daniels. Boston, 1876. Courtesy of the Library of Congress. LC-DIG-pga-03643.

¹¹⁴ “Brief Editorials,” *Christian Recorder*, December 17, 1870, 2.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁶ A.G.M., “West Texas Annual Conference,” *Christian Recorder*, January 17, 1878, 1.

¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*

The practice of displaying images of AME leaders in one's home was widespread (see Figure 5-3). One writer in the *Christian Recorder* claimed: "Never will I forget the words of that great man, the Rev. H.H. Garnett, who, as he gazed upon the picture of the immortal Allen which hangs in his own house, said, "Ah! there is a man who devised something."¹¹⁸ Garnet published a biographical sketch of Bishop Richard Allen in which he "rejoiced in having a copy" of a steel plate engraving of the Reverend Allen "which he would not exchange for a masterpiece of Rubens."¹¹⁹ The Reverend Henry McNeal Turner also reflected on "[t]he splendid pictures of our Bishops. I believe there never was more talk about our Bishops than now, as they hang conspicuously beside the pictures of Presidents Lincoln and Grant, the leaders of our people."¹²⁰ These reflections point to the ways in which owners of images used them and invested them with multiple meanings. Garnet's exclamation emphasized his reverence of Bishop Allen and implied that he aspired to Allen's accomplishments. That he hung the image of Allen in his home meant that Garnet would encounter Allen – and by extension the challenge that Garnet succeed in his endeavors – each time Garnet viewed the image.

Though he claimed residence in Mississippi, Ball preserved ties to the African American civic and political spheres of Cincinnati. Ball was reelected the librarian of the Lincoln Memorial Club in February of 1871.¹²¹ He returned the following year for the Club's annual meeting where men expressed their gratitude to Lincoln, the end of slavery, and the heroism of John Brown. Though his exact words are unknown, J.P. Ball praised President Grant in accordance with the toast given: "Eminent in the Cabinet and eminent in the

¹¹⁸ Shalom, "For the Christian Recorder," *Christian Recorder*, April 2, 1864, 53.

¹¹⁹ Henry Highland Garnet, "The Pioneers of the African Methodist Episcopal Church," *Christian Recorder*, February 20, 1869, 22.

¹²⁰ Henry McNeal Turner, "Thoughts and Facts," *Christian Recorder*, March 23, 1876, 2.

¹²¹ "Home News," *Cincinnati Daily Gazette*, February 14, 1871, 2.

field.”¹²² Grant had recently supplied weapons to the states of North and South Carolina as a means to countervail the Ku Klux Klan forces that terrorized black residents there.¹²³ Ball and other members of the Lincoln Memorial Club memorialized Toussaint L’Overture and John Brown and later reaffirmed their support for the education of black children throughout the country.¹²⁴

Ball helped sustain his peripatetic business by establishing relationships with prominent individuals elsewhere in the South. In the summer of 1871, Ball traveled to New Orleans where the editors of the *Weekly Louisianian*, a Republican newspaper founded by a future black governor of Louisiana, Pinckney Benton Stewart (P.B.S.) Pinchback, warmly welcomed him.¹²⁵ Cities joined by the Mississippi River, Cincinnati and New Orleans both supported large African American communities. Ball visited less than a year later to purchase goods for the gallery he had opened in Greenville, Mississippi. Lauded as the “Pioneer photographer of the Southwest,” Ball enjoyed additional advertisement from the writers of the *Weekly Louisianian* who noted that “[f]rom many of the specimens which we have seen of Mr. B’s skill we should think that a professional visit to New Orleans would not be unprofitable to him.”¹²⁶ Ball stayed in New Orleans for at least a week where he accepted letters at the office of the *Weekly Louisianian*.¹²⁷ Only a few years before, African American male voters had rewritten the state Constitution and its Bill of Rights to introduce sweeping public accommodation rights.¹²⁸ In response, white supremacist groups multiplied and massacred

¹²² “Local Matters,” *Cincinnati Daily Times*, February 13, 1872, 3.

¹²³ Steven Hahn, *A Nation Under Our Feet*, 286.

¹²⁴ “The Grateful Colored Man,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, February 13, 1872, 8.

¹²⁵ “J.P. Ball Esq.,” *Weekly Louisianian* (New Orleans, LA), May 25, 1871, 2.

¹²⁶ “J.P. Ball,” *Weekly Louisianian* (New Orleans, LA), April 11, 1872, 2.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*

¹²⁸ Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom: Louisiana and Cuba after Slavery* (Cambridge: Belknap Press of Harvard University, 2005), 42-44.

African Americans – especially actual or perceived Republicans – throughout the state in the early 1870s and therefore made Ball’s trip exceptionally dangerous.¹²⁹

Ball’s political canvassing succeeded when voters elected him to lead the Board of Supervisors in Washington County, Mississippi but with dire results. He had held the position for nearly two years before two lawyers, Colonel Percy and L.B. Valliant, made claims against Ball and his son for defrauding the government out of thousands of dollars.¹³⁰ As Eric Foner has written, the influx of federal funding to Southern states provided numerous opportunities for corruption.¹³¹ In Washington County, Mississippi, the local Tax Payer’s League brought a suit against the members of the Board of Supervisors claiming damages resulting from the misappropriation of funds. Arraigned before a Grand Jury, Ball Sr. faced numerous indictments. While Ball Sr. and Jr. repeatedly claimed their innocence, the Honorable Charles Shackelford recalled that he took great pleasure when he “overruled their technicalities and refused continuance.”¹³² On the first indictment of embezzlement, the jury found Ball Sr. guilty and sentenced Ball to three years in the Mississippi state penitentiary. Fearing a similar conviction and sentence, Ball Jr. fled to Arkansas.¹³³ The local government reportedly regained \$6000 worth of property upon Ball’s conviction and his son’s departure.¹³⁴ The court convicted four other members of the Board of Supervisors and sentenced them each to three years of jail time.¹³⁵

¹²⁹ Rebecca J. Scott, *Degrees of Freedom*, 49-60.

¹³⁰ A.F., “A Sad Mishap to a Cincinnati Colored Man,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, May 24, 1873, 4.

¹³¹ Foner, *Reconstruction: America’s Unfinished Revolution*, 384-411.

¹³² 44th congress, 1st session, Senate Report 527, Part 2. Mississippi in 1875. *Report to the Select Committee to Inquire into the Mississippi Election of 1875 with the Testimony and Documentary Evidence, Volume II* (Washington: Government Printing Office, 1876), 1507.

¹³³ A.F., “A Sad Mishap to a Cincinnati Colored Man,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, May 24, 1873, 4 & J. S. McNeily, “War and Reconstruction in Mississippi, 1863-1890,” in *Publications of the Mississippi Historical Society, Volume II*, ed. Dunbar Rowland (Oxford, MS: Mississippi Historical Society, 1918), 453.

¹³⁴ “J.P. Ball in the Mississippi Penitentiary,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, May 27, 1873, 5.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*

The period between his appearance as a witness in the 1865 “Blind Tom” case in Ohio and his 1873 appearance as a defendant before a grand jury in Mississippi included several significant moments in the life of James Presley Ball Sr. The AME Church and several of its leaders shaped more than the corpus of visual material created by Ball; like Senator Revels and the Reverend James D. Lynch, Ball traveled to Mississippi to enter electoral politics during Reconstruction. He gained training for electoral politics in African American civic groups that, along with the nature of his photographic business, allowed him to not only record, but enter, Southern electoral politics. An evaluation of Ball’s photographs illuminates how he crafted a visual cultural record of the achievements of AME leaders in the Reconstruction South. Ball’s production of Senator Revels, the Reverend James D. Lynch, and other AME leaders in the South demonstrate how his business overlapped with a broader goal of AME Church leaders to increase the visibility of black politicians. At moments that detail the practices of collecting and displaying images of AME leaders, the meaning of this visibility becomes clear. These images not only document the strength and Southern expansion of the AME Church; they testify to the significance of visual culture of religion and politics during Reconstruction.

J.P. BALL SR., ALEXANDER THOMAS, AND THOMAS BALL:
FASHIONING FAMILY AND STRANGERS

While James Presley Ball Sr. nurtured mutually beneficial relationships with the African Methodist Episcopal Church, he and his former business partners – Alexander Thomas and Thomas Ball – continued to welcome secular patrons into their studios. Examining their photographs of African American men, women, and children reveals evidence of African Americans’ deliberate self-fashioning that they intended for the eyes of

family members and friends. Analysis of these images expands the practices of seeing and the politics of self-fashioning endeavored by nineteenth century African American subjects.

After the end of the Civil War, the photography studio of Ball & Thomas in Cincinnati flourished which enabled them to contribute to the African American community. Alexander Thomas and Thomas Ball had practiced photography for many years alongside J.P. Ball before they decided to dissolve their partnership in 1860. Their parting from J.P. Ball occurred long after Alexander Thomas had married J.P. Ball's sister, Elizabeth, in 1850 and had gone into business with J.P. Ball soon thereafter. After his son returned from boarding school in Massachusetts, J.P. Ball Sr. made his son, J.P. Ball Jr., a partner in what became J.P. Ball & Son in 1869. While J.P. Ball became increasingly concerned with politics outside of Ohio, Alexander Thomas and Thomas Ball focused their energies primarily on the civic organizations in Cincinnati. Being in business in Cincinnati for nearly 20 years, the pair had long participated in efforts to benefit the African American community.

Alexander Thomas and Thomas Ball dedicated their energies to the future of African American youth and the commemoration of Abraham Lincoln. Both active in Cincinnati's Lincoln Memorial Club, they petitioned Congress to recognize his birthday as a national holiday.¹³⁶ Thomas Ball's peers elected him to the Presidency of the Lincoln Memorial Club in 1870.¹³⁷ Thomas Ball also served on the Board of the Colored Orphan Asylum for more than ten years during which he helped organize dozens of benefit concerts, educational campaigns, and community gatherings.¹³⁸ Alexander Thomas continued to operate his gallery

¹³⁶ Anniversary of the birthday of Abraham Lincoln. House of Representatives 43d Congress, 1st Session. Misc. Document No. 148.

¹³⁷ "Commemoration of Lincoln's Birthday by Colored Citizens," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, February 13, 1870, 5.

¹³⁸ "Death of a Prominent Colored Citizen," *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, January 31, 1875, 4.

after his business partner, Thomas Ball, succumbed to tuberculosis in early 1875.¹³⁹ Alexander Thomas continued his participation in the Lincoln Memorial Club and on February 12, 1876, the members met at his home and the Honorable G.L. Ruffin joined them.¹⁴⁰ With their financial privilege – Thomas Ball had accumulated \$5,300 in wealth by 1870 – both Ball and Thomas actively participated in the African American community in Cincinnati when they were not photographing patrons in their studio.



Figure 5-4. James Polk (probably). *Carte de visite*. Ball & Thomas Studios. Circa 1874-75.

Figure 5-5. Wallace Shelton Polk. *Carte de visite*. Ball & Thomas Studios. Circa 1874-75.
Courtesy: Cincinnati History Library & Archives.

¹³⁹ “The Gazette speaks,” *Cincinnati Daily Enquirer*, February 2, 1875, 4.

¹⁴⁰ “Celebration of the Sixty-Seventh Anniversary of the Birth of Abraham Lincoln,” *Cincinnati Commercial Tribune*, February 13, 1876, 6.

An examination of a few portraits taken by these photographers reveal the methods by which African American sitters, photographers, and family members constructed and replicated ideas about black respectability. The images reveal that the sitters sometimes prepared long in advance for their trip to the studio, and other times photographers made quick decisions that might undermine the intentions of the sitters or their family members. In other words, the process of constructing a persona of oneself in a photograph could be quickly and easily determined by the circumstance of the studio such as props and camera location.

Multiple elements of the *carte de visite* depicting James Polk work together to communicate how the viewer should interpret the image (Figure 5-4). Ball & Thomas' *carte de visite* of James Polk revealed the process of transforming a young boy into a young, respectable adult. James Polk sits on a plush, armless chair fringed with tassels. His legs crossed, hands relaxed, and holding his body with an ease more typical of an adult, James Polk engages the viewer with direct eye contact. He appears comfortable wearing his jacket, leather shoes, and bow tie. Wearing fashionable clothes, James sits within an environment that exudes middle class respectability. The sumptuous, upholstered chair with ornamental feet and the neoclassical column behind him reinforce the middle class respectability that his clothing communicates. His posture, clothing, and background convey a kind of maturity beyond his years. The *carte de visite* presents James, roughly ten years old, as a young adult. Only his youthful face reveals that he is a child. His crossed legs and clothing constructs a gendered performance to present him as a young man. He has donned the clothing and pose of an adult and visited a photograph gallery, replete with its respectable furniture and backgrounds, to create an image of accomplishment and poise. Circulated to family and

friends, and perhaps placed in a family photo album, the image of James Polk crafted the image of an upright African American middle class.

By analyzing the full-length portrait of James' brother, Wallace Shelton Polk, the tensions between conforming to and communicating middle class respectability become apparent (see Figure 5-5). While the image sought to convey black respectability, it presented some visible challenges to the photographer. Wallace stands somewhat awkwardly on a plush, armless chair fringed with tassels. Had the sitter been adult, he or she surely would not have been made to stand, legs crossed, on a chair. The problem is Wallace's height; had he been seated in the chair shown in the *carte de visite*, his legs would have dangled over the edge of the chair without touching the ground. The proportions of the chair did not conform to the bodily proportions of the four- or five-year old Wallace; had he been seated, the chair would have seemed to engulf his small frame. As a result, the decision was made for Wallace to stand on the chair. Once a gallery employee adjusted the height of the draped object serving as an elbow rest, Wallace could rest comfortably. The draped elbow rest, however, now became taller than the chair on which Wallace stood, resulting in another awkward element of an image that attempted to communicate the trappings of middle class respectability. It becomes clear that the decision could have been made to remove the chair, change the chair, or alter the height, angle, or distance of the camera, but the surviving image shows none of these. Despite these shortcomings, the classical column and drawn curtain in the background strengthen the air of middle class propriety that the tasseled chair and Wallace's fitted clothes, parted hair, and shiny boots emphasize. These elements of the portrait – pose, clothing, background, and props – work together in an attempt to present to the family or friend viewing the image of Wallace a polished young boy.



Figure 5-6. Mattie Allen. Circa 1874-1877. *Carte de visite*. Ball & Thomas Studio.
Courtesy: Cincinnati History Library & Archives

Decisions made by Mattie Allen and the photographer who captured her portrait revealed the gendered self-making process in photographic representation (see Figure 5-6). Looking away from the camera, Mattie allows the camera to glimpse a brooch fastened to her neck and large earrings pulling on her earlobes. Her turned head also provides a view of her intricately layered hair. Topped with a bow, the long hair on the top of her head gives way to shorter, curlier hair above her forehead. Beneath an undulating lace garment worn across her shoulders lays a crisp, light-colored shirt with its collar fanning out from her neck. The oval photograph mirrors her oval face. The lighting of her face offers the camera a view of her soft

expression and soft facial features. The ornate, lace-like print that trims the circumference of the rounded portrait completes the feminine symbols that Mattie Allen presents to the viewer of the portrait. The great amount of time required to prepare for this photograph demonstrates the importance of fashioning an image that family or friends would view and keep. Mattie's self-presentation, coupled with the decision to print an oval photograph and trim it with a delicately feminine print, exhibited the ways in which Mattie and the photographer worked together to perform femininity for the viewer of her *carte de visite*.

A family photo album belonging to the Ball family revealed some of the decisions made in constructing a family album. Though many of its pictures are missing or have been rearranged, the album pages list in pencil the names of the individuals whose images were once present. The Ball family photo album once began with an image of "Grandma [Susan] Ball." Probably the mother of James Presley and Thomas Ball, given that the next person featured in the family album was "Aunt Betty," or Elizabeth Ball, J.P. Ball's younger sister, Grandma Ball anchored the album as its oldest depicted family member. Shown to be 85-years-old and unable to read and write as marked in the 1870 Census, Susan Ball had been a widow for many years before moving into her son Thomas' home.¹⁴¹ After Susan Ball came two images of her daughter, Elizabeth Ball, followed by an image of Elizabeth's husband, Alexander Thomas, and then an image of Alexander and Elizabeth's infant daughter, Alice. Pictured as an infant, she wears a long, billowing dress that offered some clues as to the wealth that the Ball and Thomas families had accumulated. A caption written on her *carte de visite* reveals that the image was taken during Easter celebrations. The images that followed Alice's Easter photo, in order, were those of Thomas Ball, Alexander Thomas, two unidentified women, and Katie Thomas.

¹⁴¹ 1870 Census, County of Hamilton, City of Cincinnati, 13th Ward, page 96.



Figure 5-7. Ball Family Album. Ball & Thomas Studio. Mid- to late-nineteenth century.
Courtesy of the Cincinnati History Library & Archives.

The Ball family album created a visual familial bond of shared and archived experiences. The arrangement of the images, as well as the content of the images, helped construct ways of seeing in the Ball family photo album (see Figure 5-7). The images and their arrangement represented “constructions of their lives as they saw them and as they wish to have them seen by others.”¹⁴² A family member, or several family members over the course of generations, could build and arrange the family album as they wished, in a way that made the most sense to them. The order and placement of the images in a family photo album created a unique set of significations that changed according to the viewer. Once the photographer had captured the image, viewers held the power to make meaning from the image, and within the pages of a family photo album, the constellation of meanings produced

¹⁴² Marilyn F. Motz, “Visual Autobiography: Photograph Albums of Turn-of-the-Century Midwestern Women,” *American Quarterly* 41, no.1 (March 1989), 63.

among and between its neighboring images. The Ball family photo album depicted the celebration of births, religious holidays, adolescence, and old age common to many family photo albums. While documenting numerous moments and people in the past, one scholar has argued that the “photograph albums are intended for future viewing by their creator... or for viewing by friends and family members who can supply the necessary contextual information” not readily available to others.¹⁴³ Thus, the image resides in both the past, present, and the future. Just as much as the sitters worked to construct an image that communicated ideas about themselves, so too did the collections of images act as a performance of self-presentation that revealed the values and ambitions of those who collected.

CONCLUSION

This chapter investigated how and why African Americans crafted images of African Americans that reflected a variety of the religious, political, and historical debates occurring domestically and internationally. Robert Douglass Jr. and James Presley Ball Sr. worked within and beyond the artistic support fostered by the African Methodist Episcopal Church. The moments that their business and personal interests overlapped with the Church revealed how visual culture created by African Americans occupied the intersection of religion and politics during Reconstruction. Their images highlight their engagement in debates over the voting rights of black men, the future of Cuba, black veterans, and black officeholders and religious leaders in the Reconstruction South. An analysis of the civic events they attended, hosted, and participated in underscores how they built connections between members of African American communities and celebrated black achievements. The chapter ended with

¹⁴³ Motz, 67.

an examination of the methods by which African American sitters, photographers, and family members constructed and replicated ideas about black respectability in images intended to be viewed by family and friends. In contrast to the images of black figures created by Douglass Jr. and Ball Sr. intended for larger audiences, these photographs depict the self-fashioning of African Americans during Reconstruction. With no explicit visual commentary on the policies and events reshaping the United States during the time of their creation, these images reveal a kind of personal politics that demonstrate the values that their sitters and their families wished to convey with their likeness.

Conclusion

This project's focus on African Americans who recognized the power of visual culture demonstrates that some wielded its powers of persuasion and representation to craft images of African Americans during the middle half of the nineteenth century. When viewed together and placed in conversation with other visual representations of this era, we see that they reject the most popular and visible imaginaries that were constructed to profit from and disseminate a host of racist ideologies. When one situates these images within the racialized political and social landscapes of the middle half of the nineteenth century, it becomes clear that those who produced the images were deeply invested in the messages that their images communicated. Their images of escaped slaves, white abolitionists, Haitian diplomats, African American politicians and religious leaders, black military service members, and black sitters who ventured into studios underscored their stakes in the representation of African Americans during hotly contested debates about the future of black people in the United States.

The transformation in the technologies of imaging during the decades covered by this dissertation offered African American visual artists new ways to depict black people in their work. Images were printed in books, published in religious tracts, observed in storefront windows, hung in homes, viewed on massive moving rolls of canvas, and collected in family photo albums. Each medium possessed characteristics unique to its format including its accessibility, affordability, durability, visibility, or popularity. Those whose lives and work are analyzed in this dissertation marshaled these different formats to benefit their social, political,

and entrepreneurial aims. While one may not discern the intent behind the creation of all these African American-produced images, the evidence proves that they purposefully designed some of the images to convince viewers of the barbarities suffered by people of African descent and the respectability exhibited by them. What may also be known is how the viewer of an image crafted his or her individualized meaning of the image.

The use of visual formats further revealed how these image-makers communicated messages to viewers of their images. Throughout the chapters appear moments of an individual's precise reception of these images. These instances provide penetrating insight into nineteenth century ways of seeing. In this sense, the practices of looking at an image and then constructing its meaning within the context of antislavery campaigns, debates concerning the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, and the passage of the Fifteenth Amendment are revealed. During moments like these, the pairing of text and image generates a historical portal that allows deeper understanding of the vibrant cultural and political work undertaken by these African American entrepreneurs. With or without the textual scaffolding that can help define the contours of the images' meanings, this project places images in dialogue with their creators' own words, actions, and philosophies. In doing so, we have learned why many in the nineteenth century believed images to be uniquely instructional and educational. Furthermore, there have been multiple instances when nineteenth century viewers themselves testified to the cultural and political work that the images performed. This project provides a richer understanding of nineteenth century practices of visibility and meaning making.

It is in the work of these African American artists that we see their intervention in the visual representations of African Americans during the middle of the nineteenth century. At times, they radically challenged the dominant ways of seeing and thinking about blackness

during the middle half of the nineteenth century. The visual production of the artists featured in this study, heretofore unexamined in tandem with one another, revealed the ways in which black people produced images to celebrate, commemorate, and advocate for African Americans during critical historical moments. Integral to an understanding of these images were these individuals' simultaneous participation in multiple campaigns designed to improve the legal and social conditions of African Americans. As such, the artists in this study shaped the contours of the visual cultures during their lifetimes and their activism revealed their stakes in the political representation and the improved livelihoods of African Americans.

After the period focused on in this project, technology continued to dramatically reshape the possibilities of images by changing what photographs could show and how they could show it. The invention of Kodak's handheld camera in 1888 allowed those with the means to purchase the machine the ability to create their own images by acting in lieu of a professional photographer. Several years prior, George Eastman had patented paper roll film which photographers could use to create images instead of the glass plates or other formats that were more expensive, delicate, or challenging to work with. With the process of creating images simplified and more accessible to greater numbers of people, the evolving technologies of photography altered the visual landscape available to African Americans. Kodak produced numerous advertisements urging potential consumers to produce or expand their family photo albums using its new handheld camera and an instruction manual for photographing children.¹ Launched in 1900, Kodak's "Brownie" camera cost one dollar and further democratized photography for the estimated 10 million people who purchased it in the first five years of its

¹ Shawn Michelle Smith, "'Baby's Picture is Always Treasured': Eugenics and Reproduction of Whiteness in the Family Photograph Album," *Yale Journal of Criticism* 11, no.1 (Spring 1998), 202.

production.² Simultaneous to the expansion of leisure cultures in the United States, the rapid embrace of photographic entertainment at home offered visual possibilities unknown to audiences and on a much larger scale than ever before.³

Around the turn of the twentieth century, the dominant visual culture depicting race mirrored the socially sanctioned violence and legally endorsed racial discrimination of the era. James Presley Ball traveled throughout Mississippi while the Ku Klux Klan terrorized black residents there and in other areas of the South, the number of lynchings greatly increased in the decade before the twentieth century, and Jim Crow laws increasingly fortified racial hierarchies. Derogatory images and objects representing African Americans performed a different kind of violence. Images of pickaninnies, Aunt Jemima, and black agricultural workers laboring in the South entertained Americans and successfully persuaded consumers to purchase merchandise throughout the country while African Americans suffered the political realities of disenfranchisement and racial violence.⁴ Echoing the visual culture of previous decades, countless images of African Americans produced in the 1880s and 1890s ridiculed black people as inept, inferior, and indolent. The pervasive and enduring lives of racial caricatures that frame

² Graham King, *Say "Cheese"! The Snapshot as Art and Social History* (London: William Collins, 1986), 9 as cited in Marc Olivier, "George Eastman's Modern Stone-Age Family: Snapshot Photography and the Brownie," *Technology and Culture* 48, no.1 (January 2007), 1.

³ For more on the developments and characteristics of the leisure classes and advertising, see: Thorstein Veblen, *The Theory of the Leisure Class* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1973); Jackson Lears, *Fables of Abundance: A Cultural History of Advertising in America* (New York: Basic Books, 1994); Jonathan Crary, *Suspensions of Perception: Attention, Spectacle, and Modern Culture* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 2000); Stuart and Elizabeth Ewen, *Channels of Desire: Mass Images and the Shaping of American Consciousness* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1992); Roland Marchand, *Advertising the American Dream: Making Way for Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Patricia Johnston, *Real Fantasies: Edward Steichen's Advertising Photography* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997); Nancy Martha West, *Kodak and the Lens of Nostalgia* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia, 2000).

⁴ The enduring image and use of the figure of Aunt Jemima has been studied in: M.M. Manring, *Slave in a Box: The Strange Career of Aunt Jemima* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998); Rebecca Sharpless, *Cooking in Other Women's Kitchens: Domestic Workers in the South, 1865-1960* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2010); Micki McElya, *Clinging to Mammy: The Faithful Slave in Twentieth-Century America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007); Kimberly Gisele Wallace-Sanders, *Mammy: A Century of Race, Gender and Southern Memory* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2009).

the beginning and conclusion of this dissertation is perhaps most strikingly shown in the 1902 stereoscopic view (Figure C-1) that took as its inspiration one of the “Life in Philadelphia” prints engraved by Edward Williams Clay in approximately 1830 (Figure C-2).



Figure C-1. Underwood & Underwood, “Is yo' sho' lady when I wears dese stockings I won' fin' ma laigs all black.” 1902. Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.



Figure C-2. Edward Williams Clay, Life in Philadelphia series. Plate 11, c1830. “Have you any flesh coloured silk stockings...?” Courtesy of the Library Company of Philadelphia.

Just as several African Americans created images that proved countercultural in their depictions of black people during the nineteenth century, so too did many create images that repudiated dominant discourses of race during the early twentieth century. W.E.B. Du Bois exhibited 363 photographs at the 1900 Paris Exposition, mostly portraits of African Americans, which “collectively function as a counterarchive that challenges a long legacy of racist taxonomy.”⁵ In contrast to the pickaninny and mammy figures that predominated the racialized visual culture at the turn of the twentieth century, the images organized by Du Bois depicted black youth and adults reading, displaying illustrations, engaging in field work, posing with brass bands playing pianos, and posing with family members. Thoughtful poses and elegant clothing presented the sitters as respectable and morally upright. The photographs’ display marked the efforts of several African Americans: the African American photographer Thomas E. Askew captured many of the images that Du Bois then organized and displayed. Other black photographers who have become well known to scholars – Cornelius Marion Battey, James Van Der Zee, Hamilton Sutton Smith, Arthur Bedou, Addison Scurlock, and many others – engaged in the process of documenting the lives of black Americans at the beginning of the twentieth century. Like Robert Douglass Jr., Patrick Henry Reason, and James Presley Ball in previous generations, they too rejected the racist visual vocabularies of their era. In doing so, these African American photographers of the twentieth century carried on the legacy of the black image-makers of the nineteenth century.

⁵ Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 2.

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Boston Herald
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