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- 1 The intersection of visual culture studies and African American studies, an expanding field of research, has produced brilliant investigations of the scopic regime of race and the representation of blackness in US popular culture. The complicity of photography with white suprematism has been unveiled and its alleged objectivity questioned, but, as the editors of this collected volume write in their introduction, “we know more about Louis Agassiz’s dehumanizing scientific daguerreotypes of enslaved African Americans than we do about early African American photographers and the African American men and women who commissioned daguerreotype, tintype, carte de visite, and cabinet card portraits, collected stereocards, or made their own tourist snapshots and assembled them in albums” (4). In other words, research has tended to focus more on U.S. blacks as victims of the white gaze than as active producers of photographic meaning.
- 2 Building upon groundbreaking work by bell hooks, Deborah Willis, and others, scholars have recently expanded the study of photographic representation and African American culture beyond the traditional approach that privileges the photographer as the sole or main producer of meaning, and are increasingly including the photographed subject, the consumer of pictures and the assembler of photographic albums in the meaning-making process. A much-needed addition to this expanding area of research, *Pictures and Progress*, edited by Maurice Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (herself a photographer and a leading scholar in the field), brings together essays that look at photography as a complex, multilayered communicative act where the photographer’s authorial intentions interact with contemporary photographic codes and archives, with the sitter’s view of

him/herself, and with their reception by actual viewers. A communicative act, as the essays show, that is profoundly influenced by the central role played by slavery and race in its genealogy and popularization.

- 3 The volume focuses on early African American practitioners of photography, intended in a broad sense: as photographers; as sitters who managed to achieve a degree of control on their portraits and project an image of themselves that ran counter to mainstream depictions of African Americans as servile and uncivilized; and also as theorists and users of photography who believed in its emancipatory potential and employed it in the fight against the degrading images of blackness popularized by the minstrel show. Four short historical reflections, or “snapshots,” on some early African American photographers, authored by Shawn Michelle Smith, are also included as a way to ground the revisionist theoretical interpretations offered by the volume chapters in actual photographic practices.
- 4 The first two chapters, by Laura Wexler and Ginger Hill respectively, concentrate on Frederick Douglass as visual theorist. They analyze both his crafty use of the portrait and the little-known lectures on the subject of photography that he gave in the 1860s, where he emphasized the democratic potential of the new invention. The enlarged access to representation granted by photography would be, Douglass believed, a powerful means of reform when African Americans became authors of their own images and could document their self-possession. Augusta Rohrbach’s chapter reads Sojourner Truth’s forging of an iconic identity as an example of her ability to manipulate visual codes and interrogate the devaluation of orality by print ideology, both through the photographs that she sold as a means of support and her appropriation and exploitation of print representations produced by white authors, such as Harriet Beecher Stowe and Francis Gage.
- 5 Michael Chaney’s chapter shifts the focus from photography to the scopic regime of racialization and visibility in general, and investigates Harriet Jacobs’ deconstruction of dominant modes of seeing/displaying the black body and rendering whiteness invisible in *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*. The chapter by P. Gabrielle Foreman, previously published in *American Literary History*, analyzes the strategic passing of enslaved light-skinned women such as Louisa Picquet and Ellen Craft and their struggle over their public images, in order to question current critical representations of black genealogy as located in absence and illegitimacy that derive from an overemphasis on patrilineal descent. Ray Sapirstein’s chapter focuses on Paul Laurence Dunbar’s six volumes of poetry illustrated with photographs made by members of the Hampton Institute Camera Club, who assembled previously published dialect poems and pictures of black rural life which the poet later approved. According to Sapirstein these collective photo-texts, apparently reinforcing the view of Dunbar as catering to the white audience’s taste for the racial picturesque, subtly undermine contemporary essentialized representations of African Americans through the use of masking as trope and strategy.
- 6 Suzanne Schneider offers an interesting reading of the complete series of Louis Agassiz’s infamous slave daguerreotypes, which include five shots of denuded black men. Schneider traces their construction of the black male body as lascivious – and, as a consequence, the genealogy of scientific racism – back to the Swiss scientist’s conflictual biography and homoerotic desire. Maurice O. Wallace explores the iconicity of the Civil War black soldier, arguing that photographic portraits of African American men wearing uniforms were instrumental in easing post-emancipation white anxieties. Representing freed male slaves as assimilable into the body politic, these photographs created a new

national male subject while at the same time they obscured black women's exploitation and erased the violence of war and racism.

- 7 Shawn Michelle Smith's chapter, reprinted from *African American Review*, analyzes the collection of photographs that W.E.B. Du Bois assembled for the African Negro Exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1900 as an illustration of his visual theory of race and a challenge to the racial knowledge of white perusers of these images. Du Bois's initial selection of double photographs of African American men and women, captured in frontal and profile poses, signifies on the criminal mug shot, the type of image most closely associated with black subjects, to gradually fade into middle-class portraits where the sitter, often racially unmarked, is represented in a three-quarter pose surrounded by tokens of her social status. The chapter on Ida B. Wells's use of photographs in her anti-lynching campaign, by Leigh Raiford, similarly investigates the complex relationship that single photographs establish with the photographic archive building on the notion of "signifyin'." In her pamphlets Wells reframed the meaning of lynching photographs, meant to illustrate black savagery and white victimization, radically changing their message into a denunciation of white terrorism. Concluding the volume is an autobiographical account of the chance discovery of a family album at a sale auction, by Cheryl Finley, which spurs a meditation on the meaning of such collections for African Americans and an attempt to recover its silenced history in spite of the gaps in the archive.

- 8 The striking image on the volume cover is an apt illustration of its revisionary intent: a black man in his prime, elegantly dressed, meets the gaze of the reader at eye level, defiantly passing judgment on white America. This impressive portrait of Frederick Douglass in his early thirties was taken by Samuel J. Miller – a daguerreotypist who had his studio in Akron, Ohio – probably around 1850, while Douglass was on one of his speaking tours for the abolitionist cause. The photograph was unknown until 1996, when it was put up for auction and bought by the Art Institute of Chicago for the remarkable figure of \$185,000, the highest sum ever paid by the museum for a photograph of any kind, according to Art Institute curator Colin Westerbeck.ⁱ Less popular than other photographs of the great African American leader, where he usually looks grave and statesmanlike, it is a more eloquent index of the searing rhetorical skills Douglass employed to condemn American slavery and denounce the country's betrayal of its ideals. As Elizabeth Cady Stanton, writing on the occasion of his death, recalled, "He stood there like an African prince, conscious of his dignity and power, grand in his physical proportions, majestic in his wrath, as with keen wit, satire and indignation he portrayed the bitterness of slavery, the humiliation of subjection to those who in all human virtues and capacities were inferior to himself."ⁱⁱ

- 9 A better introduction to the essays included in *Pictures and Progress* was hard to find. The volume editors, surprisingly, do not mention the history of Miller's photograph, which they surely know. Yet, the relevant amount of money paid for this daguerreotype is a graphic illustration of their claim that it is important to shift "the focus of analysis away from the photographer as sole producer of photographic meaning to the subject as performer and the viewer and collector as interpreters of photographic meaning" ("Introduction" 15). Samuel J. Miller, indeed, is just a footnote in the history of photography and would have never entered the museum at that price had his sitter not been Frederick Douglass.

- i. Colin Westerbeck, "Art Institute of Chicago Pays Record \$185,000 for Douglass Portrait," *Ebony*, February 1997, 34.
 - ii. Available at <http://antislavery.eserver.org/legacies/frederick-douglass-elizabeth-cady-stanton>.
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Scacchi's areas of research include language politics and ideologies, gender and race studies, autobiography, multicultural children's literature. She has recently coedited the volume *Recharting the Black Atlantic* (Routledge 2008), a special issue of the journal *Ácoma* on American children's literature, and a collection of essays comparing US and Italian racial discourses.