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Portraiture and Text in African-American Illustrated Biographical Dictionaries, 1876 to  
1917

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of  
Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University

by

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## Abstract

Portraiture and Text in African-American Illustrated Biographical Dictionaries, 1876 to 1917

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A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts at Virginia Commonwealth University.

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Containing portraiture and biography as well as protest text and affirmative text, African-American Illustrated biographical dictionaries made from 1876 to 1917 present Social Gospel ideology and are examples of Afro-Protestantism. They are similar to the first American illustrated biographical dictionaries of the 1810s in that they formed social identity after national conflict while contesting concepts of social inferiority. The production of these books occurred during the early years of Jim Crow, a period of momentous change to the legal and social fabric of the United States, and because of momentous changes in modern American print industries. While portraits within the books simultaneously form, blur, and stabilize identity, biographies convey themes of perseverance, social equity, and social struggle. More specifically, text formed an imagined community in the African-American middle class imaginary. It worked together with image to help form a proto-Civil Rights social movement identity during the formation of racial apartheid.

## **Portraiture and Text in African-American Illustrated Biographical Dictionaries, 1876 to 1917**

Introduction:

Scholars across various disciplines have largely ignored African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries made between the end of Reconstruction (1876) and the First World War (1917).<sup>1</sup> As a result of this inattention, the production and cultural meaning of these technologically advanced and ideologically complex books, as well as the theoretically significant intersections of image and text within them, have gone uninvestigated. Furthermore, while scholarship on the period is well established in other disciplines, historians of African-American art have yet to produce a nuanced corpus of literature regarding the period from the end of the Civil War to the beginning of World War I. Publications such as Gerald Ward's *American Illustrated Book in the Nineteenth Century* and Velentjin Byvanck's "Public Portraits and Portrait Publics" call attention to portraiture depicting European Americans in illustrated biographical dictionaries, but these studies do not include African American figures. In 1987 Henry Louis Gates compiled *Black Biographical Dictionaries, 1790-1950*, a list comprised mostly of illustrated biographies, compendia, and histories which aids the research of genealogists interested in African American history. Nearly all of the images within the books that make up this list have gone unexamined. In *Facing History: the Black Image*

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<sup>1</sup> Leon Jackson, scholar of American print and literature, states that print, print culture, literacy, and especially the book have always played a significant but underemphasized role in the formation of African-American culture and identity. See Leon Jackson, "The Talking Book and the Talking Book Historian: African American Cultures of Print – The State of the Discipline," *Book History* 13 (2010): 252.

*in American Art, 1710 – 1940*, Guy C. McElroy shows how black portraits in the visual archive of the United States often depict an objectified and subhuman image of African Americans.<sup>2</sup> This work exposes the pernicious side of visual politics within America but also presents images produced by black artists to counter stereotypes, to resist negative images, and to affirm black identity or social success through art. However, because images within illustrated biographical dictionaries were not created by visual artists but by industrial processes and by craftspeople, artisans, and laborers in industries of print instead, these images have not made it into studies such as McElroy's *Facing History*. Additionally, any study of the production and meaning of the books necessitates an in-depth understanding of various disciplines. This necessarily interdisciplinary approach makes the study of the books more difficult and insures that there is still very little scholarship on how they were made, why they were made, or how their image and text operate together.

In this thesis, I use an interdisciplinary approach to examine the production, cultural significance, and relationship between portraiture and text of four African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries published in the United States between 1887 and 1893: William J. Simmons' *Men of Mark: Eminent and Rising* (1887), Irvine Garland Penn's *Afro-American Press and Its Editors* (1891), Lawson A. Scruggs' *Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character* (1892), and Monroe Alphas Majors' *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities* (1893).<sup>3</sup> In

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<sup>2</sup> Guy C. McElroy, *Facing History: the Black Image in American Art, 1710-1940* (San Francisco, CA: Bedford Arts, 1990).

<sup>3</sup> William J. Simmons, *Men of Mark: Eminent and Rising* (Cleveland, Ohio: G.M. Rewell & Co., 1887);



examining intersections of portraiture, biography, and the history of image-making techniques in the decades surrounding Reconstruction, this thesis will provide an in-depth analysis of understudied yet formative material objects. It will also show how the portraits within them, especially when coupled with text and narrative, were images that helped form African-American middle-class identity. Although most of the portraits of African Americans within these biographical dictionaries followed conventions of portraiture originating in Western Art rather closely, when read together with their accompanying narratives and text, they become powerful symbols of black identity and social change. They indicate that blacks maintained agency and portrayed empowerment throughout the oppressive period of Jim Crow.

Though there were African-American biographical dictionaries that predate and follow them, I have chosen to examine these four publications partly because the period in which they were produced was one of momentous and somewhat paradoxical change.<sup>4</sup> By the time these four dictionaries entered the public sphere, the American

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Irvine Garland Penn, *Afro-American Press and its Editors* (Springfield, MA: Willey & Co., 1891); Lawson A. Scruggs, *Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character* (Raliegh, NC: E.M. Uzzell., 1892); Monroe Alphas Majors, *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Activities* (Jackson, TN: M.V. Lynk Publishing House, 1893).

<sup>4</sup> For a general history of the periods following the Civil War in the United States, see Eric Foner, *Forever Free: The Story of Emancipation and Reconstruction*. Illustrations edited and with commentary by Joshua Brown (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 2005). Books that predate the four volumes include the lengthily titled *The Underground Rail Road: A Record of Facts, Authentic Narratives, Letters, & etc.* (Philadelphia, PA: Porter and Coales, 1872). This publication by black Abolitionist William Still was “Illustrated with 70 fine Engravings by Bensell, Schell and others, and Portraits from Photographs from Life.” See also William

nation had shifted from its reliance on predominantly agrarian economies and entrepreneurial capitalism to a reliance upon industrial, market-based economies and consumer capitalism.<sup>5</sup> From 1860 to 1865, the Civil War devastated and transformed the United States while the Thirteenth, Fourteenth, and Fifteenth Amendments, passed from 1865 to 1870, led to a mass emancipation of the formerly enslaved and to the acquisition by blacks of once forbidden political and social rights. The mass-migration of impoverished Europeans to American cities which had occurred before the war was later mirrored in the South as free yet impoverished blacks left plantations to live in urban centers.<sup>6</sup> Southern white industrialists including Richard Hathaway Edmunds and Henry Grady sought to create a modern, urban, and industrial region out of what had been a region dominated by American Slavery, rural plantation economies, and an aristocratic ruling elite. Beginning in 1877, these and other leaders pursued an agenda of economic development called the New South Creed (also known as New South Democracy) and initiated a period of modernization in the southern states.<sup>7</sup>

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Still's *The Rising Son, or, the Antecedents and Advancement of the Colored Race* (Boston, A.G. Brown and Company, 1882). Still was a black abolitionist and contemporary of Frederick Douglass and was widely known in his time.

<sup>5</sup> T.J. Jackson Lears, *Rebirth of a Nation: The Making of Modern America, 1877 – 1920* (Chicago: Harpers Collins, 2009), 56.

<sup>6</sup> According to Foner, between "1869 and 1870 the black population of cities such as Richmond, Virginia; Charlotte, North Carolina; Vicksburg, Mississippi; and Little Rock, Arkansas, more than doubled." Foner *Forever Free*, 82.

<sup>7</sup> C. Vann Woodward, *The Origins of the New South: 1877 – 1913* (Baton Rouge, LA: Louisiana State University Press, 1971).

Frustrated by class tensions which arose because of southern modernization and resentful of the attainment by blacks of previously forbidden civil and social rights, many white Americans sought to revive the antebellum traditions and racial hierarchies of the Old South and initiated a strict social apartheid called Jim Crow.<sup>8</sup> In 1865, white politicians established Black Codes which often required as punishment involuntary labor and which were enacted to stabilize a white supremacist culture extant before the Civil War. Other forms of this attempted cultural redemption were more violent and included the establishment of white supremacist terror organizations such as the White League and KKK. This redemption also included an uptick in the production of cultural discourse employed to stereotype and scapegoat black citizens.<sup>9</sup> Most egregious was the phenomenon of lynching which involved “drawn out torture, mutilation, burning, and the dismemberment” and which increased in frequency in the 1870s, peaking in the 1880s and 1890s, and going well into the 1900s.<sup>10</sup> Eighty-percent of all lynching

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<sup>8</sup> For the relationship between American modernization and the increasing oppression blacks faced after Reconstruction, see Lears, 93. Here he makes such a relationship clear, asserting that “Southern lynching in the 1890s, like the incandescent racism that spawned it, was a product of modernity.”

<sup>9</sup> Historian Joshua Brown writes that, during Jim Crow, an “avalanche of racist imagery in new mass-circulation publications and on movie screens reached every corner of the country, establishing apelike, childlike, and criminal stereotypes of African Americans.” See Joshua Brown, “Jim Crow,” in Foner, *Forever Free*, 214.

<sup>10</sup> According to Manfred Berg, between the time the New South Democracy began in 1877 and going into the 1920s, the phenomenon of “spectacle lynching,” occurred regularly in the South. Black editors would have been cognizant of the phenomenon when planning and producing their books. For a history of lynching in the United States, see Manfred Berg, “Indescribable Barbarism: The Lynching of African

occurred in the New South. It injected terror and fear into the psychologies and social memories of black communities.<sup>11</sup> Legally ordained segregation within the public sphere, which had started with the Black Codes, became increasingly endemic nationally. Despite dissent from social activists, the United States Supreme Court handed down the *Plessy v. Ferguson* decision in 1896, further concretizing racial apartheid by sanctioning segregation in all American public space. The period of modernization, urbanization, and industrialization called the New South commenced simultaneously with the socio-cultural and socio-political regime of apartheid called Jim Crow. In short, as blacks produced *Men of Mark*, *Afro-American-Press*, *Noted Negro Women*, and *Women of Distinction*, they saw the United States enter a phase of modernity and prosperity while watching it become progressively more hostile to its black citizens.

African Americans in the South experienced an increasingly oppressive social environment in the late 1800s but also gained greater access to institutions of learning and to skills needed to address this mounting oppression. "In southern cities," historian Eric Foner explains, "[a] network of institutions whose foundations had been laid during Reconstruction - schools and colleges, churches, businesses, fraternal orders, women's clubs, and the like - served as the infrastructure for thriving and increasingly diverse black urban communities."<sup>12</sup> Now at or near centers of discourse formation such as the

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Americans in the Age of Jim Crow," in *Popular Justice: A History of Lynching in America* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2011), 90 – 116.

<sup>11</sup> Berg, 93.

<sup>12</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 203.

black church, the black press or the black university, African Americans in the South met the expansion of oppressive regimes with critical cultural discourse. Literacy was a skill essential in producing and consuming such discourse and had maintained a central position in black culture even before the Civil War. Frances Smith Foster calls attention to “the existence of a viable literate and relatively cosmopolitan African-American population” in the antebellum North.<sup>13</sup> Enslaved blacks in the South were forbidden by laws such as the South Carolina Act of 1740 and the Virginia Code of 1819 to read and write, often acquiring literacy surreptitiously.<sup>14</sup> The ability to read and write was for southern blacks “an element of liberation,” or, in other words, a means of freedom from the oppressive institution of Slavery.<sup>15</sup> After the Civil War and the subsequent abolition of laws prohibiting literacy, a counterpart to the literate and relatively cosmopolitan black population in northern cities formed in southern cities. Literacy continued to maintain its central cultural position as a component of liberation in the context of Jim Crow.

The editors of these four volumes were highly literate members of a newly formed social class. They were young adult men from the South, ranging in age from the early twenties to the late thirties and also held positions of leadership in newly formed institutions of the black middle-class, namely black universities or schools, and usually had some training in the printing trades. Born in Virginia, for instance, Irvine G. Penn (1867 – 1930) was twenty-four when he published *Afro-American Press and its*

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<sup>13</sup> Frances Smith Foster, "A Narrative of Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African American Print Culture," *American Literary History* 17, no 4 (winter 2005): 720.

<sup>14</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 21.

<sup>15</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 21.

*Editors* in 1891. He was principal of Lynchburg public schools at the time and had been editor of the *Lynchburg Laborer*, a nationally recognized black newspaper. Lawson A. Scruggs (1857 – 1914) was also a Virginian by birth. William J. Simmons (1849 – 1890) was a South Carolinian. Both Scruggs and Simmons were thirty-eight when they published their volumes. Monroe A. Majors (1857 – 1914), a black physician from Texas, was twenty-nine when he published *Noted Negro Women*. While a student in college, Majors worked as a reporter for local newspapers. All born in the South, Penn, Majors, Scruggs, and Simmons would have also had considerable autonomy compared to other southern and urban blacks who usually held manual or industrial occupations.<sup>16</sup> They would have lived through Reconstruction to face the establishment of Jim Crow. Some would have seen the shift from Slavery to Emancipation while others (Williams J. Simmons, for instance) were at one time enslaved. What should be taken away from all of this is that Simmons, Penn, Majors, and Scruggs had newly attained social privileges as well as access to and a familiarity with a large amount of critical discourse and would have, therefore, been at an important nexus of discourse formation and in an excellent position to manage the production of these four volumes.<sup>17</sup>

William J. Simmons wrote that he had “made copious extracts” from “speeches, sermons, addresses, correspondence and other writings for the purpose of showing [black Americans’] skill in handling the English language and to show the range of

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<sup>16</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 203.

<sup>17</sup> The biographical data included in this paragraph and in much of this thesis is from the prefaces, introductions, and biographical entries of the selected volumes.

thoughts of the American Negro.”<sup>18</sup> Indeed, *Men of Mark*, *Afro-American Press*, *Women of Distinction*, and *Noted Negro Women* contain a large and diverse amount of textual material which middle-class blacks collected, read, viewed, excerpted, and synthesized from correspondence, newspapers, autobiographies, novels, poems and even other biographical dictionaries. Though Simmons asserts that he alone excerpted his contemporaries’ work, the amount of textual material included within these volumes indicates that in order to produce them many people probably had to collaborate. Furthermore, when Penn informed a colleague that his 1893 publication *Afro-American Press* would “come out just as soon as we secure the photos of some editors who lived and wrote in the 30’s and 40’s” and that “we are on the trail of their photos and if we get them, we will make engravings at my expense,” he described what was a collective process that would have taken not only his effort but the efforts of his students, assistants, employees, and colleagues.<sup>19</sup> These collaborators gathered adulations of black leaders from newspapers including the *New York Freeman*, the *Louisiana Standard*, and the *Cleveland Plain Dealer*. They copied portions of speeches including those given in 1883 at the National Convention of Colored Men by Frederick Douglass and excerpted entire passages of Douglass’ *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*.<sup>20</sup> The black abolitionist William C. Nell’s 1855 book *History of the Colored Patriots of the American Revolution* is also cited in Simmons’ dictionary and forms a large portion of a

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<sup>18</sup> Simmons, 8.

<sup>19</sup> Quoted in Joanne K. Harrison and Grant Harrison, *The Life and Times of Irvine Garland Penn*, (n.p., 2000), 63.

<sup>20</sup> Simmons, 75.

biographical sketch about Denmark Vesey, the organizer of an 1822 slave rebellion in South Carolina.<sup>21</sup> In Majors' *Noted Negro Women*, the biographical sketch of Phyllis Wheatley contains text from several sources including *Webster's Unabridged Biographical Names*, the historian William T. Alexander's *History of the Colored Race in America*, a biography by the historian Benson J. Lossing, poems by Wheatley, and a 1776 letter to the poet written by President George Washington.<sup>22</sup> Included in the 1892 dictionary, *Women of Distinction*, is text from *History of the Negro Race in America* written by George G.W. Williams, the black Civil War veteran and historian who was one of the first to decry King Leopold's Congo Free State. This volume also includes text from newspapers such as *Frank Leslie's Illustrated Newspaper*, the *Boston Globe*, the *Indianapolis Times*, the *Philadelphia Times*, the *London Times*, the *Brooklyn Times*, and the *New York Times*. Previously published illustrated biographical dictionaries played a significant role in the production of later publications as well. Text in Scruggs' *Women of Distinction* directs the reader to Irvine Garland Penn three times, recommending his *Afro-American Press* as an "excellent book."<sup>23</sup> In a biographical sketch about T. Thomas Fortune in *Afro-American Press*, a quote is excerpted directly from Simmons' *Men of Mark*.<sup>24</sup> Approximately ten lines of text excerpted directly from *Men of Mark* follow this citation. Simmons often inserts cited text: "I here insert an

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<sup>21</sup> Simmons, 232.

<sup>22</sup> Majors, 17.

<sup>23</sup> Scruggs, 204, 272, and 304. The above quote is found on page 304 in the biographical sketch of Kate D. Chapman Tillman.

<sup>24</sup> Penn, 134 - 135.



analysis of Mr. Jasper's theory, as published in the sketch of his life by Hon. E.A. Randolph, LL.B."<sup>25</sup> By using such a large body of text, a small fraction of which I have mentioned here, the collaborators who helped produce the dictionaries engaged in a practice that literary historians call "variations of copying," or the "adaptation, citation, deployment, reproduction" of textual discourse.<sup>26</sup>

African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries were intensely moralizing luxury items bought by subscription. However, they were affordable enough to circulate as commodities among members of the recently formed black middle-class. At the back of *Afro-American Press* there are advertisements for A.E. Hyde's *The Story of Methodism* that would be "read eagerly by the family around the fire side." Announcements from black newspapers appear here and moralize the reader as well. R.C.O Benjamin, whose portrait and biography appear on pages 320 and 321, had his *San Francisco Sentinel* advertised in the *Afro-American Press* as a "weekly newspaper devoted to the moral, social, intellectual, industrial and political interests of Afro-Americans." *The Freeman* of Indianapolis, the *Baptist Vanguard* published by the Arkansas Baptist College, and the *Appeal*, "published simultaneously" in Chicago, St.

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<sup>25</sup> Simmons, 1064. John Jasper was a religious leader of Richmond, Virginia. He gained national acclaim for his "Sun do Move" sermon, a "bible argument" against heliocentric theories of astronomy being debated in a mid-nineteenth-century United States dominated by church as much as by state. The sketch had first been written by D.B. Williams, a professor at Virginia Normal and Collegiate Institute, a black college in Richmond.

<sup>26</sup> Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein, "Introduction," *Early African American Print Culture in Theory and Practice*, eds. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 15.

Paul, Louisville, St. Louis, and Minneapolis, are also featured in the back of the book where blacks promoted their presses. Reverend T. Thomas who seems to have lived in or near Fairfield, Alabama, was the owner of an African-American illustrated biographical dictionary. A copy of *The Cyclopedia of the Colored Baptists of Alabama: Their Leaders and Their Work* in the University of Virginia Library's Special Collections is stamped with his name and post-office box address. Addison V. Overby of Grove, Virginia, owned a copy of Washington et al.'s *New Negro for a New Century* published in 1900. The publication, which is also held at the University of Virginia, is marked with the date March 4, 1903, possibly when Overby came into possession of the hefty and elaborate volume.

Joanna Brooks, scholar of comparative literature, provides an important framework for understanding how these books operated as objects within spheres of black cultural production. She maintains, for instance, that social environments with “existential conditions of chronic discontinuity and disruption” such as Jim Crow adversely affect book culture but are especially challenging “to the production, consumption and collection of substantial books” made by minority groups.<sup>27</sup> Brooks

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<sup>27</sup> Joanna Brooks, “The Unfortunates: What the Life Spans of Early Black Books Tells Us About Book History,” in *Early African American Print Culture in Theory and Practice*, eds. Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 40 – 52. Brooks writes, “we might say that books and especially those substantial, more pricey books of more than forty-eight pages have life spans and life chances – lesser and greater chances of being written, published, sold, bought, read, reprinted, circulated, and then collected and preserved – that correlate positively with the race of the author.” Brooks, 42. In other words, books by blacks and by other racial minority groups are rarer than books produced by white authors.

also asserts that substantial books, defined as publications of more than forty pages, “truly depend on social movements to survive” or to be produced whatsoever.<sup>28</sup> *Men of Mark* is nine inches high, contains 1,138 pages, and includes 106 portraits. *Afro-American Press* is 8 inches in height, contains 565 pages, includes a fold-out newspaper, and includes 137 portraits printed by the electrotpe process invented in 1838. *Women of Distinction*, which contains 382 pages and 44 portraits, and *Noted Negro Women*, which contains 365 pages and 65 portraits, are both more than eight and a half inches high. Because the four dictionaries examined in this thesis were produced in one of the most adverse social environments faced by blacks in United States history, Brooks’ stipulation which connects black publications to social movements provides a necessary and fruitful framework for my overarching argument: these books fundamentally engaged and altered early social formations that would become the modern Civil Rights Movement and they show the efficacy of portrait and biography in processes of social change.

As significant as these books were in processes of social change, the tendency to reinforce notions of celebrity through the repeated representation of well-known figures is apparent within them. The first biographies and portraits that the reader usually comes upon are those of individuals who achieved substantial national acclaim, who form a pantheon in nineteenth-century black historiography, and who continue to dominate historical discourse as celebrated figures in more recent periods. Phyllis Wheatley is the first historical figure represented in Scroggs’ *Women of Distinction* and

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<sup>28</sup> Brooks, 49.

in Majors' *Noted Negro Women*, for instance. Majors, who did not procure a portrait of Wheatley, asserts that she "was a woman whose greatness of soul the whole world admired."<sup>29</sup> The well-known Frederick Douglass is the first featured in Simmons' *Men of Mark*. Language in the volume underscores the continuity of Douglass' celebrity over time. Using the metaphor of a "star ascending the zenith" to describe the abolitionist, a contributor to *Men of Mark* writes that "No man has begun where Frederick Douglass did and attained the same giddy heights of fame."<sup>30</sup> The description goes on to state that the Douglass' name "will ever be written on the pages of all future history, wherever the names of the ablest men of our times appear, side by side with those of the more favored race."<sup>31</sup> Penn's appraisal of Ida B. Wells, who is also featured in Scruggs' and Majors' dictionaries, also foretells the leader's later position in historical discourse. According to Penn, "No [contemporary black] writer, the male fraternity not excepted, has been more extensively quoted" and no other individual "struck harder blows at the wrongs and weaknesses of the race."<sup>32</sup> Just as some figures maintained a dominant, celebrity status in their own time, they maintain a dominant, central position in history today.

One of the intentions of this thesis is to examine portraiture and text that represent those who did not achieve national fame or celebrity but who were, nonetheless, respected enough to be included in the four dictionaries. Alongside portraits and

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<sup>29</sup> Majors, 17.

<sup>30</sup> Simmons, 73 – 74.

<sup>31</sup> Simmons, 73 – 74.

<sup>32</sup> Penn, 33.

biographies of such well-known individuals as Frederick Douglass and Ida B. Wells, appear portraits and biographies of lesser-known leaders such as John Mitchell, Jr., a Virginia-based editor, and the clergyman and politician Henry McNeal Turner. Along with Booker T. Washington and Frederick Douglass, *Men of Mark* honors carpenter and joiner Jeremiah A. Brown, silk culturist Samuel R. Lowery, and William Still, “Coal Dealer – Twenty Years Owner of the Largest Public Hall Owned by a Colored Man.” I emphasize the aggregation of well-known, lesser-known, and even figures who until recently have remained obscure, in order to oppose art historical trends of hagiography, or the obsessive academic focus on figures who obtained, whether in their life time or posthumously, celebrity status and who often form the accepted Canon of black history. Such a focus usually predicated the elision of lesser-known histories all the while impairing independent criticality and allowing the reinstatement of positions of cultural privilege as well as cultural marginality. Moreover, I hope to underscore the heterogeneous mix of people represented by portrait and biography within African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries in order to emphasize the importance of those lesser-known individuals in social movements and social change.

To keep the scope of this project manageable, I have examined only portraiture and text within illustrated biographical dictionaries that would have produced in the reader’s or the viewer’s mind an image of a national community of black leaders. There are a number of books produced for a smaller, more regional audience, which would have produced a smaller, more regional image. I have excluded books such as Charles Octavius Boothe’s *Cyclopedia of the Colored Baptists of Alabama: Their Leaders and Their Work* printed by the Alabama Publishing Company in 1895. Nor have I included

W.D. Johnson's *Biographical Sketches of Prominent Negro Men and Women of Kentucky* printed by the Standard Print Company of Lexington, Kentucky, in 1897. The lives of their editors were similar to those who edited the selected works. Almost without exception, they were young adult black men when they began editing the volumes. At the age of three while enslaved in Alabama, Boothe acquired a "tin-plate containing the alphabet" which he used to learn to read, and, at age fourteen, he worked in the law offices of Colonel James S. Terrel where he had access to "still a broader range of books."<sup>33</sup> Boothe started compiling *Cyclopedia of the Colored Baptists of Alabama* at the age of thirty-seven. W.D. Johnson, born in England in 1860 to an "Englishman" and a mother who was a "native of Bengal, India," was thirty-seven when he published his dictionary. Johnson was a journalist and editor who managed the Standard Print of Lexington, Kentucky. His firm printed *Biographical Sketches of Prominent Negro Men and Women of Kentucky* in 1897. Sara J. Duncan, who edited *Progressive Missions in the South and Addresses* published in 1906, served as a general superintendent of the Women's Home and Foreign Missionary Society of the A.M.E. Church and as a secretary for the church as well. All of these editors had greater access to literacy, print culture, and novel forms of image reproduction than most did blacks of their time.

I also exclude illustrated general histories or compendia edited by blacks though they seem to have proliferated during the period. I have not thoroughly analyzed larger publications such as G.F. Richings' *Evidences of Progress among Colored People* (1900) and Booker T. Washington et al.'s *The New Negro for a New Century: An*

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<sup>33</sup> Charles Octavius Boothe ed. *The Cyclopedia of the Colored Baptists of Alabama: Their Leaders and Their Work*, (Birmingham, AL: The Alabama Publishing Company, 1895), 10.

*Accurate and Up-to-Date Record of the Upward Struggles of the Negro Race* (1900).

However, the books that I have excluded were produced with similar intentions and in similar social environments. They operated much like illustrated biographical dictionaries made in the same period, had considerable social force as cultural objects with narratives of equality, and fit within the archive of similar cultural sources.

The chapters within this thesis are organized to better illustrate the phenomena of social, cultural, and visual production that led to the production of African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries. In an attempt to do them justice as it were, I would like to place the books and their contents in the discourses of various disciplines including social history, book history, the history of print, and art history. Social and legal changes allowed the formation of the southern black middle-class, members of which are represented in the books. These representations depend on novel technologies that were developed mostly in the nineteenth-century. Therefore, legal, social, and technological histories are considered first. I consider print institutions as well as theories regarding print and identity formation second to set up the last section, in which portraits are examined. I examine portraits last because these images played a supportive role within a larger social context and for a larger social project. The selected time frame of 1876 to 1917 marks one of the last years of Reconstruction and the beginning of stricter racial apartheid in America called Jim Crow. The second year coincides with American mobilization of troops in World War I, an event that made black leaders more vocal and invigorated in the struggle for black equality. Each chapter becomes successively more theoretical as I attempt to describe the functions and use of image and text in the publications.

In Chapter One, I assert that while the hostile social environment of the New South necessitated the production of these books as tools of cultural resistance, it was the adoption of modern technologies that made them possible as physical objects. The first section provides a more extensive summary of the oppressive social environments, discourses, and visual cultures in late-nineteenth-century America that blacks resisted by producing illustrated biographical dictionaries. Developments in print and imaging technologies – including photography, industrial book making, and photomechanical reproduction – as well as the subsequent standardization of these new technologies within nineteenth-century American industries of print were fundamental in the production of the books. Drawing from the recently published work of historians including Gerry Beegan, Scott E. Casper, Michael Winship, Carl F. Kaestle, and Janice R. Radway, the second section provides a detailed examination of technological processes, such as industrial book production, facsimile wood engraving, and the halftone.<sup>34</sup> The discussion of photography in this thesis is indebted to photographic historian Deborah Willis' work on the subject and specifically to her recent book

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<sup>34</sup> See Carl F. Kaestle and Janice A. Radway, eds., *A History of the Book in America*, Vol. 4, *Print in Motion, The Expansion of Publishing and Reading in the United States, 1880 – 1940*, (Chapel Hill, N.C: Published in association with the American Antiquarian Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 2007); and, for an extensive history of industrial book production in mid-century America, see Michael Winship, "Manufacturing and Book Production," in Scott E. Casper et al. ed., *A History of the Book in America*, Vol. 3, *The Industrial Book, 1840 – 1880* (Chapel Hill, N.C: Published in association with the American Antiquarian Society by the University of North Carolina Press, 2007), 40 – 69; and Gerry Beegan, *The Mass Image: A Social History of Photomechanical Reproduction in Victorian London* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008).



*Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers*.<sup>35</sup> As Penn's statement indicates, editors often had to secure portrait photographs before they could be reproduced within the volumes. By analyzing the portraits more closely, I explain the processes by which they were produced and reproduced, showing that they were the products of a complex network of cultural appropriation and production that underscores the fluidity of the American nation in the nineteenth-century.

In the first section of Chapter Two, I demonstrate the centrality of social movements as well as literary traditions in the production of the volumes and specifically show that the editors appropriated discourse from the Social Gospel, a social movement of the late nineteenth century fundamental in forming the black middle-class in the South. Though this movement is largely responsible for the formation of black institutions of higher learning and, therefore, for the formation of the black middle-class and its concomitant identities, it has gone underemphasized in various discourses. I also show that collaborators also operated within a cultural continuum which literary historian Frances Smith Foster calls Afro-Protestantism.<sup>36</sup> I present an examination of the prefaces and introductions in the books to show the intent with which Americans produced them. Included here are theoretical frameworks that allow us to better grasp the text. A central argument in this chapter is that, in undertaking what was clearly the exhaustive task of collecting and reproducing discourse, African Americans supported a counter narrative of equality set against dominant narratives of racial and gender

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<sup>35</sup> Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000), 11 – 15.

<sup>36</sup> Foster, 715.

inferiority. For instance, T. Thomas Fortune wrote in Scrogg's volume that "One of the marvels of modern society is the honorable position which woman has secured in the affairs of mankind" and further still that women had "secured a measure of equality with the forceful agents that make the world's history."<sup>37</sup> In creating text, editors also intended to produce for the reader an understanding of what historian Benedict Anderson has conceptualized as an imagined community.<sup>38</sup> Biographical narratives in these books are textual representations that work to stabilize and to make clearer conceptions of what it meant to be a successful member within the African-American middle class despite social adversity. The conception of an imagined community of blacks who achieved success even within the context of American apartheid incites destabilization and, thus, social change while stabilizing black identity. Philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah's consideration of identity formation and narrative formation as mutually dependent social processes is central to the conception of how text and image operated in the biographical dictionaries to better define and even contest identity categories. Particularly useful is his explanation of how individual identity, as conveyed through biography or portraiture, fits "into our broader moral projects," a group narrative within a movement, for instance.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>37</sup> T. Thomas Fortune, "Ida B. Wells," in *Women of Distinction*, ed. Lawson A. Scrogg (Raleigh, NC: E.M. Uzzell., 1892), 33.

<sup>38</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Verso, 2006).

<sup>39</sup> Kwame A. Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 24.

Chapters One and Two provide a history of the social and technological changes that made the books significant as objects, an examination of fundamental social movements and traditions in which the editors and collaborators operated, and theory pertinent to how the books' text operated. Chapter Three examines the theoretical significance of portraiture in the four books. I argue that portraiture works within counter archives to support counter narratives thereby verifying, illustrating, signifying, and theatricalizing – bringing to life and bringing face to face – the portrayed subject and the viewing subject. In other words, the portrait as a constructed visual reference supports biographical narrative as a constructed verbal reference in order to provide contemporaries and members of future generations with more precise heuristic tools to form what sociologist James M. Jasper calls a “movement identity,” an identity “which arises when a collection of groups and individuals perceive themselves (and are perceived by others) as a force in explicit pursuit of social change.”<sup>40</sup> After a review of major scholarly works regarding portraiture and identity formation, I use the recent work of art historians including Marcia Pointon and Shawn Michelle Smith to show how mass-produced portraits in these dictionaries gave blacks an additional tool in the formation of discourses needed to preserve identity on the one hand and to destabilize it on the other. Marcia Pointon's recent *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* is referenced. I also use her application of Bruno Latour's term “factish,” an object that is not quite fetish and not quite fact, to better explain the portrait as material and culturally significant object. In the last section of Chapter Three, I argue that, without the accompanying text within the

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<sup>40</sup> James M. Jasper, *The Art of Moral Protest: Culture, Biography, and Creativity in Social Movements* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 86.

publications, portraiture in these books is relatively stable. If one were to look at the portraits without reading the prefaces, introductions, or biographies they would appear to depict individuals assimilated into a bourgeois Victorian culture. However, when the portraits and biographies of black leaders, the discourses of justice appropriated from contemporary social movements, and protest texts are all connected, they help codify and question identity.<sup>41</sup> In the words of Marcia Pointon, the images become “unstable, de-stabilizing, and potentially subversive.”<sup>42</sup> In order to explain the origins of that instability more precisely, I pair recent theories of portrait photography, specifically that of Allen Sekula, with historian Stuart Blumin’s analysis of middle-class American social formation in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and show that the “unstable, de-stabilizing, and potentially subversive” character of portraiture mentioned by Pointon arises within African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries because the category of identity called “the American middle-class” and all of its concomitant social experiences are dependent upon the maintenance of systemic black oppression, starting with trans-Atlantic slavery and transmuted into Jim Crow.<sup>43</sup> The various and

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<sup>41</sup> Anne Elizabeth Carroll, *Word, Image, and the New Negro: Representation and Identity in the Harlem Renaissance* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2005), 81. Carroll’s work examines journals such as *The Crisis* founded in 1910, following the Niagara Movement, by black leaders including W.E.B. Du Bois. It is important to note that African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries predated these publications.

<sup>42</sup> Marcia Pointon, *Portrayal and the Search for Identity* (London: Reaktion, 2012), 9.

<sup>43</sup> Stuart M. Blumin, *The Emergence of the Middle Class Social Experience in the American City, 1760 – 1900* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

common experiences of the American middle-class in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries were fundamentally related to the socially constructed oppositional relationship of black identity and white identity, a relationship in which “whiteness” meant greater privilege and, indeed, access to middle-class experience than did “blackness.” I analyze two portraits, one of a well-known historical figure (Frederick Douglass) and another of a figure who had celebrity but whose identity was nearly lost in obscurity (Thomas Wiggins). The main argument here is that portraits not only destabilize categories of identity but conflate the hierarchical categories within them.

I hope to show with this thesis that a narrative of social equality and a biography of a person who has surmounted adversity can work together with a portrait to provide a powerful semiotic device, which alters and even stops intergenerational social cycles of inequality. As image and text, portrait and biography work synergistically together as clarion calls for social change. This work will explain, for instance, why when my father saw for the first time the portrait of a highly literate Malcolm X (1925 – 1965) or a very critical and pugnacious Mohammed Ali (1942), he was moved to become literate and to struggle for a better life for himself and for others even though when he graduated high school, he was functionally illiterate and had lived in the projects of Atlanta, Georgia. Working much like the images and narratives of X and Ali of the Black Muslim Movement, the portraiture and text within these four books provided models that effectively defined and shifted identity all the while aiding the processes of social change, key social functions on which the Civil Rights Movement was predicated.

## **Chapter One: The Production of African-American Illustrated Biographical Dictionaries in Jim Crow: Social Conditions and Technological Innovations**

Comprised of the visual (portraiture) and the verbal (biographical narratives), an illustrated biographical dictionary is a publication that presents and honors individuals who maintained prominent positions within a social group. In editing and publishing illustrated biographical dictionaries of black leaders, editors harnessed modern technologies of print to reproduce, circulate, and expand categories of middle-class identity while opposing the white-supremacist culture of Jim Crow. These books were intended to reach both a white and a black readership. “We present this little volume to our race and friends of the race,” Monroe Alphus Majors wrote, “with the hope that the many and varied avenues into which our women are crowding may give inspiration to the girls of present and future generations.”<sup>44</sup> For whites they would serve as evidence of “race progress,” as illustrations of a successful philanthropic investment made for a liberal cause after the Civil War. For blacks they served as moralizing models after which the reader could fashion her or his own black middle-class identity, from which, that is to say, the reader could mold the self.

This chapter explores the factors that made the creation of African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries possible and, in fact, necessary as cultural objects. The first section examines the expansion of civil rights caused by legal changes during Reconstruction. These changes provided the social space necessary for the formation of the black middle-class and its institutions in the South. This section also reviews the

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<sup>44</sup> Majors, ix.

hostile social environment arising after Reconstruction and the social backlash that the editors faced while producing the publications. The second section presents a brief survey of American print technology and culture starting in the 1810s, when Americans produced the first illustrated biographical dictionaries. The main argument here is that changes in industrial print technologies, print culture, and the expansion of civil rights made the mass representation of the modern black middle class within African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries feasible. Black middle-class representation in the South would not exist without legal changes after the Civil War, nor would it exist without the modern technologies of print and photography. However, an uptick of racist ideology, legally enforced segregation, lynching, and the introduction of conservative state legislation after Reconstruction meant that civil and social rights for blacks effectively waned soon after they gained them. Therefore, I argue that, facing what historians have called “the nadir” of race relations and the “highest stage of white supremacy” in United States history, black editors perceived the production of the books as necessary tools of cultural resistance.<sup>45</sup>

### Reconstruction and Jim Crow

The majority of individuals portrayed within African-American biographical dictionaries were born in the southern United States. Significant legislative and social

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<sup>45</sup> Rayford W. Logan, *The Negro in American Life and Thought: The Nadir, 1877 – 1901* (New York: Collier Books, 1965); John W. Cell, *The Highest Stage of White Supremacy: The Origins of Segregation in South Africa and the American South* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1982).

changes in nineteenth-century American law occurred in order for the portraits and biographies of these individuals to exist. Alterations of American law occurred during Reconstruction from 1865 to 1876 and dramatically affected the social fabric of the United States. Congress passed the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1865, the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1866, and the 15<sup>th</sup> Amendment in 1869. Often called the Reconstruction Amendments, these alterations to the American Constitution respectively prohibited involuntary servitude, provided African Americans citizenship and equal protection under the law, and established universal manhood suffrage. These legal changes provided the social space needed to form the black middle class in the South and allowed blacks greater access to modern technologies of print necessary for the industrial production of text and image in publications such as modern illustrated biographical dictionaries.<sup>46</sup>

After the Civil War, education for African Americans became more formal resulting in an increase in literacy rates by the mid- and late-1800s. Prompted by Abraham Lincoln and passed by an American Congress dominated by liberal whites, a series of acts collectively called the Freedman's Bureau bills were passed into law in 1865. The result of these bills was The Bureau of Refugees, Freedmen, and Abandoned Lands, a federally operated organization often called the Freedman's Bureau whose purpose was to educate blacks and to aid in their transition from enslavement to free citizenship. This institution, along with mutual aid societies, provided the groundwork for state-run public school systems where editors of African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries were trained. From 1865 to 1885, white

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<sup>46</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 131. Foner states that in the twelve-year period of Reconstruction, more blacks were politicians in the United States than in any other period until the 1960s.



philanthropists and black leaders established some eighty-five colleges and universities for blacks which were located mostly in the South. In later decades, black leaders formed groups such as the American Negro Academy (1897) and the Negro Educational Association (1900) which printed illustrated histories, biographical dictionaries, and compendia.

In the South, such changes made the burgeoning of the black middle-class and, thus its representation in illustrated biographical dictionaries, possible. The passage of the Reconstruction Amendments and the establishment of black educational institutions in the South coincided with extensive urbanization and industrialization in the region. The mass migration to cities meant that the social fabric of the South was altered both irrevocably and significantly, especially for recently freed Americans of African descent. While black populations in many southern cities grew two-fold, older kin-based structures of rural communities were fundamentally altered and disrupted.<sup>47</sup> Though many blacks came to cities with little or no capital and faced severe adversity, the rapid growth of the urban South led to the consolidation of black institutions and to the ability of blacks to access greater amounts of capital within urban spheres. Foner asserts that “the semi-independent institutions of the slave quarters and the distinctive beliefs” of the enslaved would become independent institutions like “black schools, churches, benevolent societies, and political institutions” in these urban cores.<sup>48</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 21.

<sup>48</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 22.

The result of Reconstruction was a burgeoning of the black middle class and increased access to privileges and rights, such as voting, land ownership, and education. Yet, as the historian T.J. Jackson Lears observes, this period also saw an increase in the formation of “idioms of control,” cultural, social and political processes and products enacted and produced to legitimate and solidify social hierarchies formed well before Emancipation.<sup>49</sup> These idioms of control were the result of a conservative backlash against the growth of the social changes effected after Reconstruction. The result of the backlash was an adverse social environment of white supremacy and inequality that made the production of African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries necessary as tools of cultural resistance. Starting from the 1870s with the establishment of segregation laws by state and local government and ending with the Civil Rights Act of 1965, the period of American history called Jim Crow began so that the social gains made by blacks during Reconstruction were all but reversed. White politicians who wanted to restore the old orders of the South took control of state governments as Reconstruction ended. They rewrote constitutions and passed black codes that limited voting rights, safe guarded segregation, and protected the southern plutocracy. At the federal level, the United States Supreme Court severely restricted the rights and privileges of blacks. Within a period of twenty-five years, the Supreme Court handed down decisions in cases including the *Slaughter-House Cases* (1873), *Plessy v. Ferguson* (1896), and *Cummings v. Richmond County Board of Education* (1899). These decisions encouraged the development of corporate monopolies, made social separation in both public and private space legitimate by law, and reversed the effects

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<sup>49</sup> Lears, 90.

of the Reconstruction Amendments.<sup>50</sup> The backlash against Reconstruction also took on extra-legal forms, however. White Americans formed supremacist groups like the White League, the Klu Klux Klan, and other terrorist organizations. Black public institutions such as churches and private places such as homes were targeted by whites. Race riots and lynch mobs became commonplace as the phenomenon of lynching increased throughout the United States.

White playwright and actor Thomas Dartmouth Rice's 1831 stage performance in which he mimicked and exaggerated the habitus of blacks while adorning himself with burnt cork make-up and tattered clothing is often considered the origin of black-face minstrelsy though the mode of performance likely began earlier.<sup>51</sup> Rice's use of black vernacular speech and popular song and dance, which he appropriated and labeled authentic, made his minstrel show exceedingly popular among white theatergoers. Rice's characters would also appear as authentic in American print. Historian Joshua Brown uses the phrase "white supremacist visual order" to describe the pervasive visual culture which had been produced partly due to the advent and adoption of modern printing processes.<sup>52</sup> As Deborah Willis so aptly states in her *Envisioning Emancipation*, such images were depictions of black people's "inability to determine whether or how [their] bodies would be displayed."<sup>53</sup> They characterized blacks as heathens, or as

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<sup>50</sup> For an examination of legal changes during Jim Crow, see Catherine M. Lewis *Jim Crow America: A Documentary History* (Fayetteville, AR: University of Arkansas Press, 2009).

<sup>51</sup> Brown, "True Likeness," in Foner, 31.

<sup>52</sup> Brown, 37.

<sup>53</sup> Willis, 7.

objects to be controlled and utilized for economic gain, and they supported dominant cultures and institutions including racism, sexism, and nineteenth-century black slavery.

When national economic depression threatened their enterprise in the 1880s and 1890s, Currier and Ives, one of the largest printing firms in the nation at the time, sustained their business with stereotypical depictions of black-face minstrelsy in a series called *Darktown Comics*. These cheap lithographic prints depicted both urban and rural blacks as essentially incapable of assimilating into modern American middle-class culture. The firm produced the series for white audiences whose memory of the traumatic Civil War and economic crises of their time led them to ardent xenophobia and to scapegoat blacks as the cause of the nation's plight.<sup>54</sup> Similar images would appear in film and on household goods used by white middle-class consumers throughout the twentieth century as well.<sup>55</sup> D.W. Griffith's 1915 "Birth of a Nation," which is still taught in American cinema courses as the first great American epic in film history, includes a narrative of Reconstruction in which the rise of the Klu Klux Klan is romanticized and in which the viewer encounters stereotypes formed from archetypes of

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<sup>54</sup> As Joshua Brown observes, "*Darktown Comics* probably ensured the company's financial security throughout the 1880s and into the 1890s. Each installment of the series sold quickly in the tens of thousands, and the series' ubiquity and popularity situated African Americans in the unenviable position of the nation's buffoons." Brown, "Countersigns," 182.

<sup>55</sup> W. Fitzhugh Brundage, "Working in 'Kingdom of Culture': African Americans and American Popular Culture, 1890 – 1930," in *beyond Blackface: African Americans and the Creation of American Popular Culture, 1890 – 1930*, ed. W. Fitzhugh Brundage (Chapel Hill, NC: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 1 – 44.

black minstrelsy such as the Buck, Mammie, Pickanniny, and Coon.<sup>56</sup> The image of the black as incapable of assuming American middle-class identities was widely consumed and accepted by white Americans in various media; as W. Fitzhugh Brundage writes, “now in an age of commercialized leisure and proliferating technologies of mass culture, African Americans faced the prospect that new forms of mass culture would perpetuate and even intensify inherited stereotypes.”<sup>57</sup>

In the nineteenth and twentieth centuries there was also an increase in racist textual discourse within American academic institutions so that American intellectual history contained a similar image of blacks as biologically “backward, shiftless, ridiculous, childish, [and] criminal” to use the words of art historian Richard Powell.<sup>58</sup> This discourse obscured and even repudiated the gains made by blacks after the Civil War. For instance, scholars at Columbia University propagated a skewed historical discourse pertaining Reconstruction working within a school of thought called the Dunning School. Historian Eric Foner writes that the “Dunning school is shorthand for the interpretation of Reconstruction that dominated historical writing and public consciousness for much of the twentieth century.”<sup>59</sup> It also “offered scholarly legitimacy

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<sup>56</sup> For an overview of black minstrelsy performance and its characters in film, see Donald Bogle's *Toms, Coons, Mulattoes, Mammies, and Bucks: An Interpretive History of Blacks in American Films*, 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (New York: Bloomsbury Academic, 2001), 7.

<sup>57</sup> Brundage, “Working in ‘Kingdom of Culture,’” 2.

<sup>58</sup> Richard Powell, *Black Art and Culture in the 20th Century* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1997), 25.

<sup>59</sup> Eric Foner, “Foreword,” in *The Dunning School: Historians, Race, and the Meaning of Reconstruction* eds. John David Smith and J. Vincent Lowery (Lexington, KY: The University Press of Kentucky, 2013), ix.

to the disenfranchisement of southern blacks and to the Jim Crow system that was becoming entrenched as they were writing."<sup>60</sup> Adam Fairclough sums up the school's theoretical foundations, stating that its scholars believed black leaders of Reconstruction were incompetent, promoted corruption, and lived in excessive extravagance. The argument of Dunning School scholars was that Reconstruction had harmed the South.<sup>61</sup> The prominent nineteenth-century intellectual and scholar W.E.B. Du Bois labeled the work of the Dunning School as "Standard-Anti-Negro" and asserted that its scholars "believed the Negro to be sub-human and congenitally unfitted for citizenship and the suffrage."<sup>62</sup> The school actually adopted much of its ideology from political propaganda formed by conservative Democrats after the Civil War. Nonetheless, from 1900 to the early 1950s, this historical discourse was produced, widely circulated, and widely consumed by American leaders (President and historian Woodrow Wilson, for instance), intellectuals, and students. Such consumption led to a pervasive reinforcement from elite institutions downward of concepts of black inferiority.

In her essay "Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance," bell hooks asserts that "when race and ethnicity become commodified as resources...the culture of specific groups, as well as the bodies of individuals, can be seen as constituting an alternative

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<sup>60</sup> Foner, "Foreword," xi.

<sup>61</sup> Adam Fairclough, "Was the Grant of Black Suffrage a Political Error? Reconsidering the Views of John W. Burgess, William A. Dunning, and Eric Foner on Congressional Reconstruction," *Journal of the Historical Society* 12 (June 2012), 155.

<sup>62</sup> W.E.B. DuBois, *Black Reconstruction in America: An Essay toward a History of the Part which Black Folk Played in the Attempt to Reconstruct Democracy in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2007), 652.

playground where members of dominating races, genders, sexual practices affirm” their dominance.<sup>63</sup> Dominant images of blacks in the American imaginary produced by popular culture, as well as by more esoteric cultural spheres, formed discourses of normalized oppression thoroughly connected to a narrative of racism and black inferiority. In making the bodies of black Americans consumables for a mass public, scholars such as those who operated in the Dunning School, printing firms like Currier and Ives, and filmmakers such as D.W. Griffith fixed the image of blacks within a modern American mass psychology. Black identity, though shifting, multivalent, and porous, became a crystalized image so that “blackness” was indelibly connected to alterity, inferiority, otherness, hostility, and incapability. Such conceptual crystallization effectively dehumanized real individuals of African descent, legitimating the outgrowth of more modern forms of oppression even while blacks in the late nineteenth century continued to attain and to show they could attain civil and social rights.

The formation and reproduction of stereotypical conceptions of black Americans evinced by *Birth of a Nation*, the Dunning School, and the pernicious popular visual culture of Jim Crow meant that real identities and histories were more susceptible to an attempted erasure: the elision of the prosperous and resilient African-American middle class and its concomitant identities from mass American social memory. The portraits, texts, and narratives produced by blacks within African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries such as *Men of Mark: Eminent Progressive and Rising*, *Afro-American Press and Its Editors*, *Noted Negro Women: Their Triumphs and Distinctions*, and

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<sup>63</sup> bell hooks, “Eating the Other: Desire and Resistance,” in *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 1992), 21.

*Women of Distinction: Remarkable in Works and Invincible in Character* operated against images, histories, narratives, and memories that aided in this elision. I have included the books' full titles here to highlight words such as "invincible," "remarkable," "distinct," "progressive," and "rising" and to show that editors sought to combat and to resist the visual and textual discourse that made the American social fabric so hostile to blacks, indeed a social fabric that attempted to control their identity and weaken their newly gained social standing. On the one hand, they reproduced portraits and biographies of blacks to destabilize the mass image of the black held in the social psychologies of white Americans. On the other, they sought to preserve their new yet threatened identity and social standing in American society.

### Nineteenth-Century Printing Technologies in the United States

Industries of print in the nineteenth-century United States adopted and made standard modern technologies that would lead to the invention of industrially produced illustrated biographical dictionaries. Following the development of the typographically compatible printing processes of lithography and steel-plate engraving, printers introduced the American illustrated book. More expensive and substantial than earlier publications, these were nineteenth-century luxury items and helped educate members of the burgeoning white middle-class. Historian Katherine Martinez states that illustrated books "were considered to be important tools in the moral and religious education of a



family” and “suggested an attitude toward life that the viewers could seize upon as emblematic of their own natures and goals.”<sup>64</sup>

In the 1810s, printers introduced the illustrated biographical dictionary to American consumers. Printers who could now reproduce portraits more efficiently with lithographic printing technologies would have considered the addition of portraiture a significant improvement to the production of biographical dictionaries. These publications further established and reaffirmed moral standards represented through the lives and images of American leaders. They would have aided the formation of nineteenth-century white American identity as printed objects and, as luxury items, the formation of white-American bourgeois identity. As art historian Valentijn Byvanck notes, “the newly-emerging genre of the illustrated biographical dictionary [was] a continuous presence on the antebellum market” from its introduction onward.<sup>65</sup> The American illustrated biographical dictionary was, in fact, a new place in which people could present portraits.<sup>66</sup> The first of these was the 1816 publication *Delaplaine's Repository*

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<sup>64</sup> For a history of the American illustrated book, see Gerald Ward, ed. *The American Illustrated Book in the Nineteenth Century* (Henry Francis du Pont Winterthur Museum: Winterthur, Delaware and Charlottesville, VA: The University Press of Virginia, 1987). Ward writes that “two events in particular were crucial to the development of a major printing industry in the United States: the introduction of lithography, followed by the use of other planographic printing processes, and the rapid growth of book publishing activities.” Ward, vii; See also Katherine Martinez, “‘Messenger of Love, Tokens of Friendship’: Gift-Book Illustrations by John Sartain” in Ward, *The American Illustrated Book*, 96 - 97.

<sup>65</sup> Valentijn Byvanck, “Public Portraits and Portrait Publics,” *Pennsylvania History* 65 no. 1 (1998): 218.

<sup>66</sup> Byvanck, 218.

*of the Lives and Portraits of Distinguished Americans*. The *Repository*, produced four years after the War of 1812, contained eighty-one pages and included biographies and portraits of six historical figures including Christopher Columbus, George Washington and Alexander Hamilton, all of whom were significant in the formation of the new American nation.

A significant difference between the first illustrated biographical dictionaries made in the early 1800s and those made later by and for African-Americans after Reconstruction is that while the former were compiled in order to compete against contemporary publications the latter were produced often in support of both contemporary and earlier works. Byvanck states that the initial success of the firms that published the antebellum books was normally followed by bankruptcy, which allowed the rise of a competitor.<sup>67</sup> African-American illustrated biographic dictionaries did not seem to follow this cycle partly because they were sold by subscription as the copyright pages of *Men of Mark* and *Afro-American Press* illustrate. Moreover, black editors cited the work of their contemporaries as worth reading because they and their contemporaries were operating within a social movement in which a mission of a larger moral project of black progress was shared. Penn wrote, for instance, that Simmons' *Men of Mark* was "of priceless value to all who desire to know and learn of the magnates, chief scribes, and orators of the Negro race."<sup>68</sup> Such a referral shows that it

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<sup>67</sup> Byvanck, 218.

<sup>68</sup> Penn, 122.

was more collaboration than competition that prompted the production of these volumes.

Book production was rapidly industrialized in the mid- to late- 1800s. By the 1840s, recently consolidated printing firms introduced the industrial book, following the standardization of modern printing technologies such as the stereotype and the industrial printing press and the development of “a national book trade system” of business networks and the growing marketability of books as objects for the middling classes within an American consumer society.<sup>69</sup> Made of “paper produced in factories, pages printed from stereotype or electrotypes and mechanically folded and cut, housed in decorated case bindings,” the industrial book “represented the culmination of the industrialization of printing.”<sup>70</sup> These were larger than pre-industrial or non-industrial volumes and could contain a greater number of pages and illustrations. For the most part, however, industrially produced “books remained more typographic than graphic in their appearance” until “the development and introduction of successful photomechanical and photochemical techniques for the reproduction of images at the end of the nineteenth century.”<sup>71</sup>

For one, different models of industrial presses proliferated as inventors competed aggressively for market share.<sup>72</sup> The shift from the human-powered and wooden

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<sup>69</sup> Scott E. Casper et al., “Introduction,” *A History of the Book in America*. Vol. 3, *The Industrial Book, 1840 - 1880*, ed. Scott E. Casper et al. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2009), 4.

<sup>70</sup> Casper, 11.

<sup>71</sup> Winship, 63.

<sup>72</sup> The most popular of these was the Adams Bed and Platen Press patented in 1830 by Isaac Adams. It

common presses invented in the 1400s to industrial presses made completely of steel or iron and operated by electricity occurred in the book industry in the first half of the 1800s. Invented by Scottish goldsmith William Geld in 1725, the process of stereotyping or printing from a molded or cast plate called a printing plate became standard in American printing industries in the 1830s and was used in industrial presses. Book historian Michael Winship observes that with "the adoption of printing plates, relief images were locked up and cast together with type as part of a single plate, which had the added advantage of saving the original relief block from unnecessary wear on the press during printing."<sup>73</sup> The stereotype allowed the printing of pages with less deformation to the image or text on the printing plate so that books could be reproduced at faster rate and in greater volume.

Beginning around the turn of the century, American firms adopted papermaking machines that produced sheets of paper at uniform sizes not easily made by hand. Additionally, American firms had adopted industrial paper made from less expensive cotton rag as opposed to linen.<sup>74</sup> Before the 1790s, paper manufacturers collected old clothing, usually made from linen, recycling it into paper. Industrial papermaking methods and standard paper products were widely adopted in the United States by the 1840s and became predominant in American print industries. In 1794, the American inventor Eli Whitney received a patent from the United States government for the cotton gin, an industrial machine that made the processing of cotton more efficient by

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remained an industry standard until the 1880s. Winship, 53 – 54.

<sup>73</sup> Winship, 64.

<sup>74</sup> Winship, 50.

mechanizing the process of separating cottonseed from its fibers. The introduction of the cotton gin in the 1790s led to an increase in cotton production (and slavery) so that by the 1800s cotton fiber supplanted linen fiber as the major source for clothing and, subsequently, for paper.

After the second half of the 1800s, publishers and publishing firms pooled greater amounts of capital for book production. This shift occurred as publishers sought to keep up with and to create market demand among the reading public in America. To entice consumers, for instance, book producers stamped increasingly intricate designs onto the covers and spines of books and began using cheaper, cotton covers as opposed to leather ones. As Winship writes, books were now "offered for retail sale in an attractive, often stunning, new package: a decorative cloth binding, designed and paid for by the publisher, often specific to the work."<sup>75</sup> This shift is evinced by the book cover designs of Booker T. Washington's *New Negro for a New Century* (1900) and William J. Simmons' *Men of Mark* (1890). Washington's book includes elaborate gold-stamped letters, filigrees, ribbons, and a portrait of the editor surrounded by a braided border and a set of richly colored American flags. It is indicative of American Gilded Age design and art nouveau stylistic conventions. On the other hand, Simmons' *Men of Mark*, made a decade prior to *New Negro*, has small letters and a rather simple floral design on its somber cover. It is probable that Washington's ability to pool capital from philanthropists and to direct it to institutions of print had much to do with the difference in cover design. As literary historian Leon Jackson explains, Washington not only controlled all black

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<sup>75</sup> Winship, 69.

newspapers' "access to Republican Party funds" but also "exerted a powerful and not always benign influence over the funding" of the institutions.<sup>76</sup> Such a power was probably influential in the production of African-American books as well, and Washington's own project would have likely garnered considerably more funding than Simmons'. (Fig. 1)

The industrialization of image reproduction and, more specifically, the application of photography and photomechanical printing processes to commercial printing via typographical printing processes made the production of illustrations in industrial books viable. Printers and engravers reproduced the portraits by typographically compatible techniques of image reproduction that had become standard practice within the print industry starting in the second half of the 1800s. These techniques were typographically compatible because the blocks on which the images were carved could be fit into letterpresses so that printers could print image and text together at once.

One of the most significant methods of image reproduction for portraiture in American illustrated biographical dictionaries was the typographical printing technique developed from the wood engraving process invented by Englishman Thomas Bewick in the 1780s.<sup>77</sup> Wood engraving started as an interpretive process of image reproduction performed in workshops. An engraver would redraw an image onto a printing block made of boxwood and then carve out the negative space around the image, leaving a

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<sup>76</sup> Jackson, "The Talking Book and the Talking Book Historian," 273.

<sup>77</sup> Estelle Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts: Photographic Technologies in the Nineteenth Century* (New York: R.R. Bowker, 1974), 341.

relief carving or a raised surface to which ink would be applied and then transferred onto a material substrate such as a piece of paper. By the 1880s, wood engraving developed into an industrial process dependent upon photography whereby engravers worked on assembly lines.<sup>78</sup> Printers used the newer, more industrial process to create near exact copies of images, called facsimiles, for a mass public. An engraver on an industrial assembly line would either trace a photograph onto a woodblock or receive a block on which a photograph had been printed directly. The engraver would then incise the negative space leaving a relief carving from which a print would be produced. This more recent variation of the wood engraving obviated much of the interpretation characteristic of the older engraving process and resulted in a more naturalistic yet still linear image. Nearly all of the portraits in both the 1887 volume *Men of Mark* and in the 1891 volume *Afro-American Press* were produced using this facsimile technique.

In the 1830s, Englishman William Fox Talbot, an innovator of the process of photography, conceived of a photographic process by which small dots were printed onto a substrate through mesh screens and then carved out. Beginning in the 1870s, American printers used a similar technique to print mass produced periodicals such as *the New York Daily*. More specifically, it was the process developed by Frederick Ives at Cornell University in 1881 called the Ives process halftone that would supplant wood engraving as the standard process of image reproduction.<sup>79</sup> Whereas facsimile wood

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<sup>78</sup> Beegan, 47 – 98.

<sup>79</sup> For the development of the halftone by Frederick Eugene Ives in 1878, see Lois Olcott Price “The Development of Photomechanical Book Illustration,” in *The American Illustrated Book in the Nineteenth Century*, ed. Gerard Ward (Charlottesville, VA: University of Virginia Press, 1987), 234 -253.

engraving produced portraits comprised of lines, the result of the halftone process was an image consisting of subtle, tonal gradients comprised of small dots. Because of this tonal gradient, halftone images produced from photograph are more naturalistic than facsimile wood engravings. The halftone process supplanted the facsimile wood engraving process starting in the 1890s so that by 1900 it became “the major reproductive method for publishers of mass illustrated materials” according to historian Neil Harris.<sup>80</sup> Harris calls attention to the momentous effect on American culture that the halftone had, writing that, because of the introduction and standardization of the technique, the “single generation of Americans living between 1885 and 1910 went through an experience of visual reorientation that had few earlier precedents.”<sup>81</sup> According to Harris, the adoption by American printers of the halftone caused a closer and more intimate relationship between the public and print culture, between Americans’ conceptions of the self in relation to a reproduced, standardized image of another.<sup>82</sup>

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<sup>80</sup> Neil Harris, “Iconography and Intellectual History: The Half-Tone Effect,” in *New Directions in American Intellectual History*, eds. John Higham and Paul K. Conkin (Johns Hopkins University Press: Baltimore and London, 1979), 196 – 211. In his chapter, Harris calls attention to the neglect that the subject of photomechanically reproduced images has faced in the discipline of Art History: art historians “with no necessary bias against graphic communication images, did not pay attention to the half-tone revolution, for one reason, because newspaper and magazine illustration in the prephotographic era was a minor art in itself, and for another, because photography, for a long time, seemed a mechanical device that did not require aesthetic analysis.” Harris, 200.

<sup>81</sup> Harris, 200.

<sup>82</sup> Harris, 200.



The processes of the standardization of industrial and photomechanical printing that made the production of the portraits in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries possible also make tracing the portraits' origins and historical points of existence or transfer a difficult if not impossible task. Nevertheless, certain changes can be discerned by the analysis of portraits as industrial objects. Depending on the technological processes employed for their production, for instance, portraits within these publications vary in degrees of verisimilitude. Some show that the engraver reproduced the image by sketching it on a wood block in the interpretive method while others are more naturalistic, indicating a facsimile engraving process by which the image was transposed from photographic portrait. Portraits in books made later were products of the photomechanical halftone process. Most of the portraits in the 1892 publication *Noted Negro Women* and in the 1893 publication *Women of Distinction*, for instance, were halftones though there are interpreted line engravings in the volumes as well. While engravers working on *Afro-American Press* carved portraits onto printing blocks and then electrotyped the woodblocks, it is not possible to discern whether the portraits within *Men of Mark* were reproduced electrotype though it is likely they were.

Before portraits could be reproduced, editors secured either portrait engravings of blacks who lived before the introduction of photography (such as those of Richard Allen, Toussaint LOuverture, and Phyllis Wheatly), widely-circulated portrait plates of well-known contemporary figures such as Frederick Douglass, William J. Simmons, and Ida B. Wells, or photographs of their contemporaries who were not well-known and whose portrait photographs had to be obtained by personal request. Unless the image had already been circulated or was a popular image, the process by which images of

blacks ended up in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries started when blacks went to independent and, perhaps, black-owned photography studios. They would then send their portraits to editors upon receiving a request. After receiving the portraits, editors would send these images to engraving firms.<sup>83</sup> Following their transmission onto printing plates, images of blacks would be printed on paper, this time collated with biographical text and bound into industrial books. Portraits within *Men of Mark* went to the presses of W.W. Williams in Cleveland, Ohio; those in the *Afro-American Press* to Clark W. Bryan & Company in Springfield, Massachusetts; those in *Women of Distinction* to the firm E.M. Uzzell in North Carolina, which had been operating at least since the 1880s<sup>84</sup>; and, those in *Noted Negro Women* went either to the M.V. Lynck Publishing House, a black-owned firm which was located in Tennessee or, later, to the printers, binders, and engravers at Donohue & Henneberry in Chicago.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>83</sup> In the process of examining portraits within these four publications, I have identified several printing and engraving firms that reproduced the portraits as well as a firm owned and possibly operated by Myles Lynk, a black doctor in Jackson, Tennessee, whom I discuss in Chapter Two. Many portraits in *Men of Mark* were carved at Murray & Heiss, a firm of wood engravers working in Cleveland, Ohio, the Franklin Printing and Publishing Company located in Atlanta, Georgia, and the Vogt Brothers of New York, New York. The Charles van Vlack Electrotyping Company of Springfield, Massachusetts reproduced the portraits in *Afro-American Press*.

<sup>84</sup> *The Inland Printer: A Technical Journal Devoted to the Art of Printing*, 7 no. 3. (Chicago: The Inland Printer Company: October, 1887 – September, 1888), 279.

<sup>85</sup> While Lynk's black-owned firm specialized in publications for and by African Americans and was located in a southern state, the firm of Donohue and Henneberry did not specialize in black publications, was a northern company, and was likely white-owned. However, it likely had access to trade networks

The shifts from earlier to later technologies of image reproduction that would have been occurring in the print industry during the late 1800s and the manipulation by hand of portraits during the engraving process become apparent when examining the four books' portraits. Compared to portraits in the other three works, portraits in *Men of Mark* range greatly in their degrees of verisimilitude, for instance. Likenesses of Booker T. Washington and J.C. Mathews in *Men of Mark* started as photographs and were interpreted or, at least, vigorously retouched.<sup>86</sup> The portraits of Reverend George W. Dupee, born in Kentucky in 1827, and Reverend W.H. Mixon, born in Selma, Alabama, are more rough sketches than accurate likenesses. The portraits of Richard Allen (1760 - 1831) and Toussaint L'Ouverture (1743 – 1803), both of whom died before the adoption of photography, are reproduced from popular wood engravings.<sup>87</sup> M.R. De Laney's head and face were reproduced with a greater degree of verisimilitude than his body and suit. The buttons on his jacket were touched up by hand.<sup>88</sup>

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and infrastructure necessary in the circulation of Major's publication to northern communities of color. Lynk's firm was likely Afro-Protestant.

<sup>86</sup> For J.C. Mathews portrait, see Simmons, 968; for Booker T. Washington's, see Simmons, 1026.

<sup>87</sup> The name of L'Ouverture, who is dressed in French military uniform, is printed much like the names of the other figures. Simmons, 936; Richard Allen's personal signature appears below his visage. Simmons, 496.

<sup>88</sup> Additionally, a worker at the New York Photo-Etching Company produced the portrait of Reverend Calvin S. Brown located on 63 Duane Street in Manhattan according to the worker's mark. A three-quarter-length portrait of Colonel Joseph T. Wilson was retouched by hand to make the figure's sword sheath brighter. At the Atlanta Engraving Company, an engraver carved a portrait from what was a quick and rudimentary sketch of Reverend W.H. Mixon. Simmons, 1008.

The processes used in the production of portraits for *Noted Negro Women* are more numerous than in the previous publications and include the halftone, facsimile wood engraving, interpreted wood engraving, and stipple etching, a method of image reproduction using a metal plate which derives from a sixteenth- and seventeenth-century European printing technique.<sup>89</sup> The result is an image that is flecked or, more precisely, reticulated to create shadow, depth, and form. Majors' *Women of Distinction* contains a relatively greater number of halftones, some of which are touched up by hand to make the portraits more definite and to add details such as embroidery onto a figures' clothing. The halftones are also more naturalistic than those in the *Afro-American Press* and in *Noted Negro Women*.<sup>90</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Estelle Jussim describes the technique as follows: "a metal plate is covered with an acid resist. Two or three finely pointed needles are bound together and minute openings in the coating produced by rapid puncturing in the act of amassing dots which are to create the illusion of continuous half-tones by how far apart or how close together they are. The dots are then etched with acid to the desired depth." Jussim, *Visual Communication and the Graphic Arts*, 346.

<sup>90</sup> The engraving firms of Nicoli and Topp, both of which operated in Indianapolis made many of the portraits in *Noted Negro Women* that were produced by stipple etching. These include images of Zelia R. Page, a "dramatist, teacher of natural science, [and] friend of the poor," Ranavalona III, Queen of Madagascar, Lucretia Newman Coleman, Lillian Lewis, Lucy Wilmot Smith, Madame Frances E. Preston, and Lillian Parker. The Boston Engraving Company reproduced the portrait of Lillian Lewis. The stippled portrait of Lucy Wilmot Smith is marked "T. Melville," which may indicate the name of a single engraver. Most of the wood engravings in this volume were produced by E.H. Lee who operated in Chicago, Illinois. An engraver named M. Hyman produced the portraits of a few figures. The portrait of novelist Frances E.W. Harper in *Noted Negro Women* is a wood engraving reproduced from the full-length portrait which serves as the frontispiece of her book *Voices of the South* and is featured in *Women of Distinction*. The

Penn's *Afro-American Press* contains portraits of both men and women, some of which were produced by the recently introduced halftone and reveal the process by which an image was transferred since the mesh of the screen is often visible in the image. Compared to those in *Men of Mark*, portraits in *Afro-American Press* were produced at a greater number of firms. There are also a greater number of interpreted portraits. The portrait of Reverend Calvin S. Brown, produced at the New York Photo-Engraving Company, for instance, was interpreted, sketched, and then carved.<sup>91</sup> Engravers who used the interpretive method at these firms often signed their work, and the greater number of firms employed to reproduce the portraits likely led to the greater range in quality and form of portraits seen in Penn's *Afro-American Press*.<sup>92</sup> In fact, while printers who produced portraits for *Men of Mark* left few insignia, the mark of several firms are visible in *Afro-American Press*.<sup>93</sup> An engraver signed the portrait of T.

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portrait of Flora Batson is actually a halftone reproduced from an interpreted engraving. The portraits of Naomi Anderson, advocate of woman's suffrage, Blanche V.H. Brooks, president of the Woman's Temperance Union, and Olivia Davidson, an educator and financier among others are in the three-quarter pose. The portrait of Josephine A. Silone Yates, a teacher and physician, is in profile.

<sup>91</sup> Penn, 307.

<sup>92</sup> Penn, *Afro-American Press*, 203.

<sup>93</sup> The firm Nicoli of Indianapolis produced six portraits in Penn's volume; those of Honorable John L. Walker, Honorable John C. Dancy, Professor Booker T. Washington, Reverend T.G. Stewart, Edward Elder Cooper, and Honorable Josiah T. Steele. The Moss Engraving Company of New York produced several as well. The F.A. Ringler Company of New York produced likenesses of W.E. Mathews and Charles B.W. Gordon. The Electro Light Engraving Company of New York produced the portraits of Reverend G.W. Gayles and John H. Williamson. A. Leese and Company produced the portrait of

Thomas Fortune in Penn's volume as "Eng. 194 Williams St. NY," indicating the exact location in New York City where the engraving was produced. An engraver signed "Plimpton" on a portrait of Charles Hendley. And the name E.H. Lee of Chicago, which may have been a company or an individual, appears on portraits of Kate D. Chapman, Georgia Mabel De Baptiste, Alice E. McEwen, and John O. Adams Penn's work.

Widely circulated images or images within other books often appear in the publications. In Penn's dictionary, portraits of figures including Richard Allen, William Calvin Chase, M.R. Delaney, Frederick Douglass, and Alexander Crummell are also reproductions of the same portraits in Simmons' *Men of Mark*. These portraits had been reproduced on stereotype plates and were probably circulated via recently formed networks of print. Considering the citation by Penn of Simmons' work, perhaps Penn requested photographs and plates from Simmons or from one of Simmons' collaborators.

While many portraits reappear, there are widely circulated portraits that do not travel to other books. An image of the abolitionist Sojourner Truth, which started as a photograph and was copyrighted by Truth in 1864, appears in *Women of Distinction* as

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Reverend T.W. Coffee while Vogt Brothers of New York produced portraits of the Virginia lawyer R. W. Rose, Professor Julian Talbot Bailey, and the Honorable Jeremiah A. Brown. A halftone portrait of Reverend W.S. Lowry was done by the John C. Bragdon Engraving Company in Pittsburg, Pennsylvania. Other companies that produced the portraits in *Afro-American Press* include the Davis Company, J.D. Ehlers Company, Clark W. Bryan and Company of Springfield, Massachusetts, and the Charles Van Vlack electrotypers.

an interpreted line engraving but does not appear in *Noted Negro Women*.<sup>94</sup> In the latter publication Truth's biographical sketch does appear, however. It highlights the figure's bravado and powerful public image. The six-foot tall activist is described as "a revolutionist and a reformer, with great political acumen in the rough" and "a blind giant."<sup>95</sup>

There are a few portraits that deviated from norms of middle-class representation most common in the books but still conformed to standards of representation normalized in other social spheres. Portraits of performers such as Sissieretta Jones, a Virginian known as "the greatest singer of her race" and often adorned with a tiara in the publications' portraits, J.A. Arneux, who performed throughout the late-nineteenth century in the United States, and Ira Aldridge, a Shakespearean actor who worked mostly in Europe, follow conventions of representation of nineteenth-century entertainers as opposed to conventional portrayals of black leaders. Depicted in the three-quarter convention the body of J.A. Arneux is replaced by the base of a Roman sculpture bust.<sup>96</sup> The portrait is actually reminiscent of that of Alexander Hamilton in Delaplaines' *Repository*. (Fig. 2) The portrait of Ira Aldridge is full-length, contains a comparatively elaborate background with side table and carpet, and depicts the figure in the costume worn during his performances as Othello.<sup>97</sup> His portrait is an interpretation

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<sup>94</sup> Scruggs, 48.

<sup>95</sup> Majors, *Noted Negro Women*, 289.

<sup>96</sup> Simmons, 488.

<sup>97</sup> Simmons, 736.

of either a nineteenth-century lithographic print or portrait photograph of the figure.<sup>98</sup> Methodist preacher and missionary W.B. Derrick, whose “sermons, addresses and speeches are noticed in the New York Tribune, Sun, Herald, Times, the Evening Telegram, the Christian Recorder and the leading colored journals,” is depicted in a three-quarter length portrait seated on an elaborately carved chair with one finger under his chin and his fist on his thigh.<sup>99</sup> He is depicted holding a book. This portrait is reminiscent of another portrait in the *Repository*, that of Fisher Ames a Representative in the United States Congress from the 1st Congressional District of Massachusetts. (Fig. 3) The more elaborate depictions of priests and performers connote the central place of the performer and the pastor in nineteenth- and twentieth-century African American culture and indeed in future iterations of that culture as well.

There are also likenesses that indicate the ongoing, iterative, and not always chronologically linear processes of self-representation in which nineteenth-century black Americans engaged. For instance, Sarah Early’s halftone portrait in *Noted Negro Women* of 1893 depicts a younger figure than the portrait in *Women of Distinction* of 1892. The portrait of a younger Early appears in the more recent work while the portrait of an older Early appears in the earlier one. The veracity of the image is called into question and the ability of the photograph to conceal or alter conceptions of time is

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<sup>98</sup> The other full-length portrait in Simmons’ *Men of Mark* is that of the Roman Catholic priest Augustus Tolton, who trained and obtained his conferment in Rome. In the portrait, he wears a Ferraiolo, a full-length cape denoting his high social status, as well as a clerical collar as opposed to a tie or bow like most of the other figures in the volume. Simmons, 440.

<sup>99</sup> Simmons, 88.



revealed. Perhaps Early and other individuals featured within these works often played the role of editor for their own biographical entries and accompanying images, wanting their portraits to show them not as true-to-life but as ideal. It is even possible that Early wanted a portrait of her younger self reproduced in *Noted Negro Women* having been dissatisfied with her image in *Women of Distinction*.

What can be gleaned from all of this is that the processes by which image and text were reproduced for these dictionaries involved a very diverse group of people who used very diverse sets of industrial techniques, which were either standard or becoming standard in the book industry during the mid-nineteenth century. For instance, it is more than likely that engravers and printers who reproduced the portraits of blacks in these books were usually white. However, many stages of production were initiated by blacks – the process of collecting, requesting, and taking portraits are a few such procedures. The networks of image reproduction employed in the production of portraits in these books were indeed complex if not altogether novel. The social fluidity and various processes of appropriation needed for modern cultural production allowed blacks to reproduce portraits of black Americans in illustrated biographical dictionaries.

Illustrating the shift from the predominance of wood engraving to that of the halftone, the books also evince the rapid pace of technological change that occurred as massive amounts of capital were being amassed in the American nation, as firms and markets became increasingly consolidated, and as a recently formed nineteenth-century social group contested attempts waged through image and text reproduction to deny their formation. Whether reproduced from black portraits or sketched by the hand of a white engraver, these images serve as indexes of the social and technological networks

and conditions necessary for their production, the industrialization and professionalization of the printing and photography trades, and the expansion of liberal social and civil rights to the recently dispossessed who had before 1864 been considered chattel. Black Americans utilized the mass-produced portrait and its affiliated technologies to put forth evidence of their ability to exist as transformed within a transforming society and to contest the development of racial apartheid, which sought to enforce their social stagnation. As I show in later chapters, the engagement of these novel technologies and the presentation of text and image, which depended on these technologies, had indelible effects on the formation of an identity necessary for social change in the United States.

## Chapter Two: Movement, Tradition, and Structures of Narrative and Identity

This chapter provides an overview of significant institutions of print in African America and the social movements in or significant to African-American communities that existed prior to and during the production of *Men of Mark*, *Afro-American Press*, *Noted Negro Women* and *Women of Distinction*. Here, I assert that African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries published in response to the formation of visual, legal, and social regimes of oppression discussed above were vectors, to borrow Joanna Brooks's term, within nineteenth-century social movements.<sup>100</sup> As such, they were created to be objects in the formation of movement identity which would fit within a larger moral project and social movement. The brief historical summary of the chapter is included to underline the continuity of critical discourses held in black communities before and after the Civil War. I underline these to make the point that the industrial books selected for this thesis should be understood as material components within a proto-Civil Rights Movement. They acted as carriers of ideologies, vectors in other words, within a cultural archive of black middle-class society.

Facing the harsh social environment of Jim Crow, editors of these volumes produced text that was obviously inflected by Christian ideology or excerpted directly from the Bible. This text usually is rendered in support of their efforts to effect social change while facing the harsh social environment of Jim Crow. In the first section of this chapter, I make it clear that such text stems both from what literary historian Frances Smith Foster calls "Afro-Protestantism, an organic synthesis of African, European, and

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<sup>100</sup> Brooks, 52.

new-world theologies”<sup>101</sup> starting in the eighteenth century, and from the Social Gospel, a socio-religious reform movement which began in 1865 and which has been for the most part ignored by art and literary historians in their analyses of both visual and verbal black representation. The use of both religious and secular text in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries seen in the texts of Penn, Scruggs, and Washington indicates the centrality of Christianity in American cultures of social change and, more specifically, a continuation of the Afro-Protestant tradition in black print culture in the United States.

In the second section, I examine more closely what appears to be the disparate nature of biographies in these dictionaries, claiming that, in addition to the fact that they are bound together physically, narrative acts as a central axis and connects each individual biography to other biographies, making their connection apparent as a whole - - as a social body formed of individual bodies. It is this narrative that all the editors and indeed the majority of portrayed individuals espoused and that made them actors within a larger social movement. By examining the concept of narrative, I show that the books operate as a cohesive aggregate of individual identities, as a community, or rather as an imagined community to use Benedict Anderson’s conception. I argue in the second section that the simultaneous consumption of text and image within the publications would have led to an imagined community among blacks which would have served as evidence of a kind of synchronic and synchronized agency, of the ability of one’s

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<sup>101</sup>Foster, 715.

contemporaries to resist dominant discourses at once and together while facing oppressive social systems within Jim Crow.<sup>102</sup>

### Afro-Protestantism and the Social Gospel Movement

In 1891, while serving as principal of Lynchburg public schools and after running the *Lynchburg Laborer*, Irvine Garland Penn published *the Afro-American Press and Its Editors* to chronicle the life and work of eighteenth- and nineteenth-century black printers, writers, and editors. Highlighting themes of social equality and justice, Penn concluded that “In preparing this work on the Afro-American Press, I am not unmindful of the fact, that while I pursue somewhat of a beaten road I deal with a work which has proven a power in the promotion of truth, justice and equal rights for an oppressed people.”<sup>103</sup> In the last paragraph of the preface, Penn incorporated language and imagery appropriated from Christianity, writing, if “the eyes of my people shall be opened to see the Afro-American Press as it is, and as it labors with the greatest sacrifice, I shall feel that Providence has blessed my work and that I have been amply rewarded.”<sup>104</sup> Accordingly, Penn hoped that his work would help solve the social ills faced by oppressed people in the American nation, and he felt that divine intervention would play a major role in its success.

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<sup>102</sup> Anderson, 193.

<sup>103</sup> Penn, 13.

<sup>104</sup> Penn, 14.

A year after Penn published his *Afro-American Press*, Lawson A. Scruggs, physician at Leonard Medical Hospital and former professor at Shaw University, had the following quote printed on the title page of his *Women of Distinction*: “God that made the world, and all things therein...hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of earth.” Excerpted from Acts 17:24, this text had been used by anti-slavery activists before the Civil War to support claims of social equality.<sup>105</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, an activist and educator who studied at Richmond Theological Seminary in her youth and who would go on to work for Frederick Douglass as a clerk, wrote the introduction for *Women of Distinction*. She included the quote “God created man in his own image, in the image of God created he him; male and female created he them” from the Book of Genesis, which had also been used by American abolitionists to refute claims of white supremacy.<sup>106</sup> Washington used this excerpt specifically to support her subsequent claim that there “need be no trite discussion of the relative superiority or inferiority of the sexes. The claim of equality need not be mistaken for an assertion of perfect likeness.”<sup>107</sup> For Penn, Scruggs, and Washington, social rank ought to have nothing to do with social, sexual, or racial identity. Instead it was a basic human right divinely mandated.

According to the literary historian Frances Smith Foster, Afro-Protestantism was the “most consistent and influential element in the first century of African-American

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<sup>105</sup> Mason I. Lowance, *Against Slavery: An Abolitionist Reader* (New York: Penguin Books, 2000), 73

<sup>106</sup> Lowance, xix.

<sup>107</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, “Introduction,” in Scruggs, viii.

literary production,” a period ranging from the late 1700s to the late 1800s.<sup>108</sup> Institutions like the A.M.E. Book Concern and individuals of the black middle class operated within this tradition, which Foster defines as a syncretic mixture of both European and African religious customs combined in the context of eighteenth-century American Slavery.<sup>109</sup> It resulted in part from the eighteenth-century socio-religious movement starting in the mid-1700s called the Great Awakening, which placed an obligation on individuals to become literate and active participants in the American public sphere.<sup>110</sup> Africans in America who had recently converted or were converting to Christianity appropriated the ideals of the Great Awakening and began to understand themselves as “joint-heirs with Christ” (Romans 8.17) and, therefore, as equals in society in relation to whites.<sup>111</sup> They also began to conceive of literacy as a God-given right, often referring to biblical passages, such as Isaiah 30.8, which declared that the reader “Go now, write it before them on a tablet, and inscribe it in a book, so that it may be for the time to come as a witness forever.” (Isaiah 30.8)<sup>112</sup>

The first half of the nineteenth century was also a significant period for black institutions and cultures of print. The literate and cosmopolitan black middle-class of the North formed institutions in cities with strong traditions of print and comparatively larger

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<sup>108</sup> Foster, 715.

<sup>109</sup> Foster, 715.

<sup>110</sup> Foster, 717.

<sup>111</sup> Foster, 717.

<sup>112</sup> Foster, 717.

communities of free blacks than those in the South.<sup>113</sup> The 1810s, in which the first American illustrated biographical dictionaries were introduced, was the decade in which black leaders established the first African-American firm to publish books.<sup>114</sup> Members of the African Methodist Episcopal (A.M.E.) Church established the Book Concern of the A.M.E. in 1818. The institution was the first black-owned and operated book producing firm. Its publications decried slavery, social inequality, and unethical treatment of blacks, major themes that would be reproduced in later generations and within future books.<sup>115</sup> The Book Concern, the abolitionist William Wells Brown who wrote the novel *Clotel* (1853), northern newspapers such as John Russwurm's *Freedom's Journal* (1827), his *Rights of All* (1829), and Frederick Douglass' *North Star* (1847) as well as other black abolitionists and activists published both religious and secular works that can be placed within the tradition of Afro-Protestantism.<sup>116</sup>

Black institutions of print and imaging grew and consolidated in the United States as blacks gained greater access to novel imaging and print technologies. There was, of course, a predominance of independent, black institutions of print in the North before the Civil War. This is not to say, of course, that blacks were not involved in print culture in the South during this time. Enslaved blacks in the South had been involved during

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<sup>113</sup> Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein, eds., "Introduction," *Early African American Print Culture in Theory and Practice* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 1 - 18.

<sup>114</sup> See Donald Franklin Joyce, *Black Book Publishers in the United States: A Historical Dictionary of the Presses, 1817 – 1990* (Greenwood Press: New York, 1991).

<sup>115</sup> The Book Concern of the A.M.E is still in operation today.

<sup>116</sup> Foster, 715.



American Slavery in the printing trades. In his foundational work on African-American art, *Modern Negro Art*, James Amos Porter describes the role that enslaved blacks had in the reproduction of images and text in print. Citing Isaiah Thomas' *History of Printing in America*, Porter explains how enslaved blacks were "bred to the press," or trained within the shop of a craftsman to set type on a letterpress and to engrave onto woodblocks.<sup>117</sup> Porter also explains that "in early American newspapers we occasionally find specific reference to a slave's talent for graphic expression and even definite affirmation of his skills as a finished artisan."<sup>118</sup> Southern blacks had been involved in print culture before the middle of the nineteenth century but could, after Emancipation, use modern technologies with a greater degree of agency and independence though they were often barred from printing unions. Furthermore, as art historian Deborah Willis shows in her *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers*, while portrait photographs became increasingly important forms of self-representation for blacks beginning with the adoption of the medium by the public in 1839, portrait photography became an industry in which blacks operated with considerable successful beginning with the introduction of paper prints and glass-plate negatives, a year before the Civil

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<sup>117</sup> James Amos Porter, "Negro Craftsmen and Artists of Pre-Civil War Days," in *Modern Negro Art* (Washington, D.C.: Howard University Press, 1992; first published 1943 by the Dryden Press, New York; published by the Arno Press in 1969), 5.

<sup>118</sup> Porter, 5 – 6.

War began, in 1859.<sup>119</sup> After the Civil War, black photographers began to find a burgeoning market as the black middle-class grew.<sup>120</sup>

Engraving and printing firms that produced African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries before the turn of the century were usually established in the North and were white-owned. However, there were firms in southern cities that produced publications within the tradition of Afro-Protestantism. These were established mostly in the 1890s and included the Negro Educational Association and the American Negro Academy, both of Richmond, Virginia, and the Alabama Publishing Company of Birmingham, which published *The Cyclopedia of the Colored Baptists of Alabama* in 1895. The outgrowth of Afro-Protestant institutions of print during Jim Crow is best evinced by anti-lynching activist Ida B. Wells' statement that "The Afro-American press is gradually growing in power and rightly used it will at last win the race's victory."<sup>121</sup> African-American medical doctor Miles Vandahurst Lynk of Jackson, Tennessee, printed African American illustrated biographical dictionaries as well as other publications before the turn of the century.<sup>122</sup> Lynk was born to formerly enslaved parents in 1871 and attended rural public schools in Tennessee. He became a teacher and used his earnings to pay for his enrollment in institutions of higher learning and to begin training as a medical doctor. By the 1890s, he established the M.V. Lynk

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<sup>119</sup> Willis, 11.

<sup>120</sup> Willis, 15.

<sup>121</sup> Ida B. Wells quoted in Majors, *Noted Negro Women*, 192.

<sup>122</sup> Lynk is not documented in any of the books reviewed for this thesis, including Penn's *Afro-American Press* which was printed when Lynk operated his publishing house in Tennessee.

Publishing House in Jackson. In 1893, Lynk's firm printed *Noted Negro Women and The Afro-American School Speaker and Gems of Literature: For School Commencements, Literary Circles, Debating Clubs, and Rhetoricals Generally*. Three years later, in 1899, he also printed a "profusely illustrated" book with rudimentary wood engraved portraits titled *Black Troopers, or the Daring Heroism of the Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War*.<sup>123</sup>

Afro-Protestant institutions like the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the M.V. Lynk Publishing House, and black newspapers as well as the textual discourse they produced were central to the formation of black ideologies of justice and equality in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries. To stress my point, the text in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries of the late nineteenth-century was a product of the Afro-Protestant tradition starting in the late eighteenth century and illustrates the combination of religious discourse with socio-political exigencies. For instance, when Josephine Turpin Washington supported her statement about a "claim of equality" with the biblical quote from the Book of Genesis, she operated within the tradition of Afro-Protestantism. However, she also operated within a social movement called the Social Gospel. That figures such as Sarah E.C. Dudley, Francis A. Harper, Clarissa M. Thompson, and L.A. Westbrook in *Women of Distinction* and *Noted Negro*

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<sup>123</sup> There are wood-engraved portraits signed by individual artisans within Lynck's *Black Troopers* or in Donald F. Joyce's *Black Book Publishers in the United States: A Historical Dictionary of the Presses, 1817-1990* (New York: Greenwood Press, 1991). The firm, as do all others discussed in this thesis, also falls outside of the date range of Peggy Jo Zemens Richmond's *Afro-American Printers and Book Publishers* (master's thesis, University of Chicago, 1970).

Women were proponents of women's suffrage and were members of temperance organizations like the Women's Christian Temperance Union connects them to the Progressive Era, a period of increased social activism starting in the last decade of nineteenth-century America. However, historians rightly argue that it was the Social Gospel that led to the formation of middle-class black identities held by such blacks as the editors of *Men of Mark*, *Afro-American Press*, *Women of Distinction*, and *Noted Negro Women*.<sup>124</sup> Though the Social Gospel was essential in the formation of the black middle-class in the South, scholars who have examined either visual or verbal black representation in the first few decades after the Civil War have not investigated the relationship between the movement and leaders of the black middle-class. In the recent publication *Pictures and Progress*, which explores the role that photographic representation played in the pursuits of black activists and leaders during the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, none of the eleven contributors mentions the Social Gospel though its ties to black leaders and activists, including Booker T. Washington and W.E.B. DuBois, have been made clear by historians.<sup>125</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr.'s "Trope of the New Negro" is one of the few studies to mention an African-American illustrated

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<sup>124</sup> For a general history of the Progressive Era, see Steven J. Diner, *A Very Different Age: Americans of the Progressive Era* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1998).

<sup>125</sup> Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012). For the relationship of black activists such as Washington and Du Bois to the Social Gospel, see Ronald C. White, "Conservatives versus Radicals: Washington and DuBois," in *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877 – 1925)* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 91 - 104.

publication.<sup>126</sup> However, Gates does not consider the religious culture of black leaders (which was indeed Afro-Protestantism) or the Social Gospel movement to which many black leaders had ties. Instead, he connects the publication to later art and literary movements including the New Negro Movement and the Harlem Renaissance of the North though these movements were not as significant as Afro-Protestantism or the Social Gospel in the formation of the southern black middle-class identity or in social and cultural movements of the South in the nineteenth- and twentieth-centuries.

The Social Gospel marked a shift in nineteenth-century American Protestantism from an emphasis on individual salvation to one on social salvation as church leaders after the Civil War began to make racism, classism, poverty, and inequality central concerns.<sup>127</sup> Members of the movement were mostly white Protestants from the North and included the civil rights activist and lawyer, Albion Tourgée, who defended Homer Plessy in the 1896 *Plessy v. Ferguson* case, and Lyman Abbott, a Congregationalist editor, theologian, and mentor of Booker T. Washington. As historians Ronald C. White and Charles Howard Hopkins assert, leaders of the movement carried tenets of social equality from the era of Abolition into the decades after Emancipation, launching

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<sup>126</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr., "The Trope of a New Negro and the Reconstruction of the Image of the Black," in *Representations* 24 (Autumn 1988): 129 - 155. Gates examines the African-American illustrated biographical compendium titled *the New Negro for a New Century* which was co-edited in 1900 by Booker T. Washington

<sup>127</sup> Ronald C. White and Charles H. Hopkins, *The Social Gospel: Religion and Reform in Changing America* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1976), 3.

“crusades for the rights of oppressed groups of all sorts.”<sup>128</sup> Such leaders explicitly criticized what White calls the “structure and ethos of white supremacy,” the systemic cultures of prejudice that secured whites a privileged place in American society.<sup>129</sup> Referring often to the life of Jesus Christ and citing Biblical text to support claims of social equality, proponents of the Social Gospel maintained that all humans were equal under God and that the social ills of the American nation were systemic yet solvable conditions caused by the various processes of American modernization.<sup>130</sup>

The education of the southern black-middle class after the Civil War depended on missionary efforts of adherents to the Social Gospel. In *Abolitionist Legacy*, John M. McPherson states that before the First World War, “northern mission societies founded largely by abolitionists were by far the most important contributors to Negro higher education” and that, “because they were firmly rooted in the institutional structure of American Protestantism,” institutions such as the freedmen’s education societies expanded in the 1870s even while facing economic depression.<sup>131</sup> In the ten-year period after the Civil War, for instance, northern missionaries founded more than one thousand black schools in the South and stipulated that their instructors teach blacks moralizing

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<sup>128</sup> White and Hopkins, 6. See also Ronald C. White, “The Negro Question,” in *Liberty and Justice for All: Racial Reform and the Social Gospel (1877 – 1925)* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1990), 3 – 9.

<sup>129</sup> White and Hopkins, 42.

<sup>130</sup> White and Hopkins, 30.

<sup>131</sup> James M. McPherson, *Abolitionist Legacy: From Reconstruction to the NAACP* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1975), 148.

Christian ideology.<sup>132</sup> Leaders of the Social Gospel also often served on the boards of black universities founded by religious organizations such as the American Missionary Association.<sup>133</sup> Black leaders of the South after the Civil War had direct connections to Social Gospel leaders or were at least indirectly connected to the movement. Lyman Abbott, for instance, helped Booker T. Washington write his autobiography *Up from Slavery*, editing its chapters and giving Washington advice on how to organize the book's text.<sup>134</sup>

Irvine Garland Penn received a primary education in the public school system of Lynchburg, Virginia, which had been established with the assistance of white philanthropists and Christian missionaries in 1871.<sup>135</sup> Wiley College, where Penn received his doctorate, was founded in 1873 by Isaac William Wiley, who was elected bishop of the Methodist Episcopal Church in 1872. Both Lawson Andrews Scruggs and Josephine Turpin Washington attended the Richmond Institute of Richmond, Virginia, which had been founded by the Baptist Home Mission Society.<sup>136</sup> Howard University, where Washington received her college education, mandated that trustees and faculty

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<sup>132</sup> McPherson, 151.

<sup>133</sup> White and Hopkins, 125.

<sup>134</sup> White and Hopkins, 92.

<sup>135</sup> For Penn's early life, see Daniel B. Williams' introduction to *the Afro-American Press and Its Editors*, ed. Irvine Garland Penn. See also Janice Schmidt Stennette, "Teaching for the Freedmen's Bureau: Lynchburg, Virginia, 1865 – 1871." Ph.D. dissertation University of Virginia, 1996.

<sup>136</sup> See Charles H. Corey, *A History of the Richmond Theological Seminary, with Reminiscences of Thirty Years' Work Among the Colored People*, (Richmond, VA: William Ellis Jones, 1894), 52.

be members of “some Evangelical Church” and received substantial support from northern Christian organizations run by liberal whites of the Social Gospel.<sup>137</sup>

African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries made under the oppressive regime of Jim Crow are products of both a century-old tradition of Afro-Protestant literary production and the contemporaneous Social Gospel movement, which commenced after Emancipation but which itself upheld abolitionist ideology of justice and equality. Penn’s “promotion of truth, justice and equal rights,” Scruggs’ citation of Acts 17:24, and Washington’s assertion that “the claim of equality need not be mistaken for an assertion of perfect likeness” should be understood in such a context. The connections that these leaders had to the Social Gospel as well as the tradition of Afro-Protestantism which, again, was the “most consistent and influential element in the first century of African-American literary production,” helped form epistemological frameworks in which the editors and their collaborators operated while producing their volumes.

### Narrative and Imagined Communities

William Simmons assured the reader that “I have not tried to play the part of a scholar but a narrator of facts with here and there a line of eulogy.”<sup>138</sup> Simmons’ attempt

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<sup>137</sup> From Robert F. Markam to Michael E. Strieby, Jan. 11, 1878, AMA Archives; *Second Annual Report FASME*, Cincinnati, 1871, p. 27. Quoted in McPherson, 151. For a biography of Josephine Turpin Washington, see Majors, *Noted Negro Women*, 199 - 201

<sup>138</sup> Simmons, 9.



to narrate facts is indeed reminiscent of W.E.B. DuBois' attempt in *Facts of Reconstruction* to produce textual discourse as revisionist argument and evidence against the faulty presentation of history. This concern with fact will be revisited in Chapter Three. Simmons' role as "narrator of facts" is indicative of the nineteenth-century cult of factuality, a modern American obsession with veracity and fact-checking groomed in a consumer market itself dependent more and more on the production of novel products by competitive and consolidated firms run by people who often create facts to induce consumption. However, the concept of narrative, and more specifically counter narrative, provides a great degree of theoretical space in which the books can be understood.

In structuralist and post-structuralist theory, narrative is a representation of a history and biography in which we build a conceived order of social operations, events, and temporalities. Such construction is embedded within a deeply engrained social psychology, itself inflected by ideology or ideologies, as well as by social and environmental conditions. In this way, the idea of narrative not only explains but justifies reality because it is conceived of as being based on fact and truth. The Dunning School, for instance, is an excellent example of narrative as a form of historical representation in which a series of events is ordered or omitted, depending on an overarching social psychology. Conversely, editors of the dictionaries also sought to convey both reality and desire in ordering and binding together biographical narratives.

Combining the semiotic and the psychological components of a narrative to address his concerns with identity formation, philosopher Kwame Anthony Appiah defines the concept as both a story by which a person chooses to live and a discursive

text in which a person is placed.<sup>139</sup> Narrative is less an arbitrary category or nominal label (an individual identity, for instance) than a guiding representational convention formed through common memories, ideas, histories, and social realities which an individual can choose.<sup>140</sup> It is a binding factor in collective, group identity and is indispensable in understanding “the longer and longest term intentions” of a group or a person.<sup>141</sup> Narratives work to form historical experience and social memory, both of which affect concepts of identity, and they help mold what sociologist James A. Jasper calls a “collective moral vision,” a conception of what should be affirmed or what should be denounced.<sup>142</sup>

The cultural resonance of these books is so forceful not because of biography alone which, according to Jasper, “covers the processes by which certain elements of a broader culture are selected for use in an individual’s mental and emotional arsenal.”<sup>143</sup> Nor is it so strong simply because of the coupling of biography to portrait. Instead the books’ operative power stems from their position in American culture as conduits of a larger narrative that biographies and portraits support but which is greater than the sum of either biography or portrait. Those who read the text and image in these dictionaries formed and still can form models for their lives from overarching narratives of equality, justice, struggle, and truth. This ability to engage in narrative provides the cultural

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<sup>139</sup> Kwame Appiah, *The Ethics of Identity* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005), 22 - 23.

<sup>140</sup> Appiah, 22 - 23.

<sup>141</sup> Appiah, 22.

<sup>142</sup> Jasper, xii.

<sup>143</sup> Jasper, 54.

momentum for intergenerational overlays of “identity.” Thus in stating that he attempted to narrate facts, Simmons expressed the desire to represent history and biography and to engage a larger narrative structure. His book and other biographical dictionaries like his presented narrative structures that would provide the reader additional psychological sustenance in the form of a greater, collective moral vision as he or she faced the certainties of subjugation during Jim Crow.

The concept of an “imagined community” provides another productive framework by which the process of the formation in readers’ psychologies of such collective vision can be understood. Though used first to conceptualize the social processes of modern state formation, it has profound significance in understanding the African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries as helpful in the formation of black middle-class identity. As defined by historian Benedict Anderson in his 1983 text *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism*, an imagined community is the conception of an individual within a larger community. It can be understood as imagined “because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion.”<sup>144</sup> This community does not exist in real-time or in face-to-face relations with the individual. Instead, as the term suggests, an imagined community exists in the imagination, the psychologies, of those who read or view printed material concurrently with others. The result of this simultaneous

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<sup>144</sup> Benedict Anderson, “Introduction,” *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (New York: Verso, 2006), 6.

consumption is, more precisely, the understanding of oneself as an individual within a conceptual group space.

The consumption of mass-produced print in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, which depended on the expansion of modern print-capitalism, led to a mass-conception of time that revolves around, depends on, and indeed produces a philosophical understanding of being simultaneous to, as opposed to preceding or being outside of, one's own time. Anderson's argument is that a conception of temporal simultaneity, where the future and the past conflate in "an instantaneous present" is necessary for the formation of an imagined community.<sup>145</sup> In other words, an individual also sees his or her self as a kind of punctum within a new social field so that contemporary blacks who recently gained access to institutions of print and to print media produced in these institutions would have understood themselves within an imagined community of people contemporary to their own time and, more specifically, to the exigencies of they faced in Jim Crow.

The ability for black leaders to form a collective moral vision and group identity with others in relatively distant geographies was thereby strengthened by the simultaneous consumption of mass produced print such as the illustrated biographical dictionary. The subsequent process of simultaneous group identification within the moral projects formed because of Afro-Protestantism and the Social Gospel movement gave blacks a coherent "public voice, louder and more strident than it had been even during slavery" as literary historian Henry Louis Gates Jr. writes.<sup>146</sup> As I explain in the

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<sup>145</sup> Anderson, 23.

<sup>146</sup> Gates, 131.

following chapter, this voice was better defined by the addition of mechanically reproduced portraiture to the publications. Of course, an imagined community would have likely existed prior to the acquisition of any one of the four dictionaries because printed media produced in black communities would have already been disseminated and consumed by its constituents. However, upon reading the biographies and viewing the portraits in these works, an already-formed imagined community would become clearer and would have helped form a more coherent concept of group identity to which a nineteenth-century African American could subscribe and with which the reader could even possibly form and solidify actual social networks.

This imagined community was not only intended for use by the editors' contemporaries. In his preface, Monroe Alphus Majors wrote that he and the collaborators of *Noted Negro Women* also produced the dictionary "with the hope that the many and varied avenues into which our women are crowding may give inspiration to the girls of present and future generations."<sup>147</sup> Simmons intended *Men of Mark* to be consumed by future generations in various geographies as well, or in his words by "intelligent, aspiring young people everywhere."<sup>148</sup> Henry McNeal Turner, first southern bishop of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, wrote in his introduction to *Men of Mark* that "we men who gather up the fragments of our labors, acts, achievements," "will stand out as heroes in the day to come."<sup>149</sup> Turner continued: "To this book, when Dr. Simmons will be numbered with the dead for centuries, will come the men above

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<sup>147</sup> Majors, ix.

<sup>148</sup> Simmons, 6.

<sup>149</sup> Henry McNeal Turner, "Introduction" in Simmons, 62.

described, and others in countless scores, to light their torches, inspire their young, encourage the doubtful, animate the faltering and forward tide of elevation till the last Negro boy and girl on the globe shall be product of their color, their hair, their origin, and their race.”<sup>150</sup>

Josephine Turpin Washington also evokes the ability of narrative to cross temporalities and geographies when she states the following in her introduction to *Women of Distinction*: “let us chronicle their deeds in fitting phrase that those who come after may be inspired by the record of what has been wrought to make the most of their liberal opportunities.”<sup>151</sup> Within all four illustrated biographical dictionaries, a clear emphasis is placed on the construction of the self, in the present and future, and the support of an empowered image of the self, an image of agency, within the larger American society. Thus, the same biographies and portraits that operated to form imagined communities for contemporaries formed an archive for later generations.

More precisely what appears in the biographies of these books is a consistent narrative of facing adversity, overcoming a struggle, and giving back to the community, a narrative that is ever-present in African-American culture and that is borrowed from Christian discourse. Jesus’ life narrative, for instance, follows the same trajectory. Most biographies make note of individuals who had to discontinue education in order to take care of families or to pay for school. Many figures such as Ida B. Wells became educators in public school systems or institutions of higher learning. Frederick Douglass’s life is a well-known example of the model. As he explains in his *Narrative of*

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<sup>150</sup> Turner, 63.

<sup>151</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, “Introduction,” in Scruggs, xvi.

*the Life of Frederick Douglass* and his subsequent autobiographies, his desire to acquire literacy led to a desire for freedom and ultimately to his position as an arbiter and patrician of African-American society. In publishing the abolitionist newspaper *the North Star* Douglass attempted to promote manumission for enslaved blacks, a privilege he had acquired illegally, but wished others would have as well. Featured in *Afro-American Press*, the biography of W.E. Mathews a “General Newspaper Reporter and Novel Writer” who was born to an enslaved woman in 1861 in Georgia follows this format as well. Penn writes that Mathews’ mother, “after considerable legal trouble, succeeded in gaining possession of her children, and returned with them to New York.”<sup>152</sup> In New York, W.E. Mathews would later prepare “a series of historical textbooks which will aim to develop a race pride in [black] youth.”<sup>153</sup> Penn’s biographical narrative in the introduction to his 1891 *Afro-American Press* is an example of this as well. For a short period starting in 1882, Penn had to discontinue his education due to “circumstances, over which he had no control.”<sup>154</sup> However, in 1887, he became a teacher, printer, and was elected to the Lynchburg Public School system shortly thereafter. After facing a period of hardship and then entering into positions of leadership within the black community, Penn conceived the reproduced images and text that formed his dictionary as a boon of knowledge bestowed on his community. The life of L.A. Scruggs, editor of the 1892 dictionary *Women of Distinction: Remarkable in*

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<sup>152</sup> Penn, 375

<sup>153</sup> Penn, 376.

<sup>154</sup> Penn, 8.

*Works and Invincible in Character*, follows this arc as well. A native of Bedford County in Virginia, Scruggs was born in 1857 to enslaved parents. He had only a basic education and had worked as a laborer for both the Atlantic and Mississippi Railroad and the Western Union Telegraph Company. Scruggs later attended Richmond Institute, where he started studying in 1877, and became one of the first licensed African-American doctors in the state of North Carolina.

Because editors made African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries for individuals in the future to form a conception of “heroes” who lived in the past, the concept of an imagined community, which describes for the most part the formation of contemporary social and political identities, is projected forward in hopes that future generations would see themselves within an intergenerational lineage, comprised of identities as archetypes formed first during Reconstruction. Therefore, when reading the books in later periods, the textual biographies operate as models from which readers can form an understanding of the self in a larger narrative which spans over many generations from Abolition onward. The above excerpted text presented above illustrate the common intent held by collaborators working on these dictionaries to present heroic models to members of later generations, to form out of copied fragments of text which served as biographical narratives a collective pantheon of black heroes.

What moved the editors to produce the books was the desire to form an oppositional narrative that factually and truthfully detailed the social condition of virulent racism in the Jim Crow South whereby the black subject was brutalized, abused, raped, and denigrated in representation and in reality. The editors evoked cultural narratives of liberation formed by blacks on American plantations or appropriated from the Social



Gospel Movement and from Afro-Protestantism to oppose the social reality of adversity. These narratives often convey an ambivalence toward material progress and capitalism carried over from the Social Gospel Movement and from Afro-Protestantism. This ambivalence is employed to subtly critique the expansion of economies and modernization that led to social inequality and, subsequently, to the oppressive social regimes of Jim Crow.<sup>155</sup> In the preface to *Men of Mark*, for instance, Simmons wrote that he “would rather [his book] do some good than make a single dollar” and that “by no means” did he “send it forth with the sordid idea of gain.”<sup>156</sup> I. Garland Penn also wrote that the “object in putting forth this feeble effort is not for the praise of men or for the reaping of money.”<sup>157</sup> One is reminded of racism and materialism, two of the three giant triplets critiqued by Martin Luther King Jr., a southern social activist who operated within Afro-Protestantism and who graduated from and taught at Morehouse College, a black university formed out of the Social Gospel. On the other hand, some narratives are also more explicitly present in the books. Penn wrote that *Afro-American Press* was produced to promote “truth, justice, and equal rights for an oppressed people.”<sup>158</sup> Josephine Turpin Washington, a professor who once served as clerk for Frederick Douglass, wrote that “the true woman takes her place by the side of man as his

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<sup>155</sup> Lears states that “the antimodern impulse was both more socially and more intellectually important than historians supposed.” Lears, xv. For a definition of antimodernism, see, Lears, 5.

<sup>156</sup> Simmons, 5.

<sup>157</sup> Penn, 13.

<sup>158</sup> Penn, 13.

companion, his co-worker, his helpmeet, his *equal*.”<sup>159</sup> In writing that “Her forcible pen, her caustic oddness, have disarmed the disputing South as to women’s ability,” a contributor to Majors’ *Noted Negro Women* explicitly disputed the white patriarchal culture that was prevalent in the United States.<sup>160</sup> These examples underscore the fundamental position that narratives of equality, whether gender or racial, had in the production of the books. It was the intention of the editors as well as those who worked closely with them to convey these narratives in the present and into future.

This chapter has shown that both the tradition of Afro-Protestantism and the Social Gospel movement were significant in the formation of the black middle class and in the education of black leaders who produced these books during Jim Crow. Upon entering institutions of higher learning established or supported by members of the movement, editors and collaborators who worked on these books came into contact with Social Gospel ideology and the moralizing Christian narratives of equality and justice that continued to be defended after the Civil War. They would have also appropriated from the Afro-Protestant tradition the practice of supporting claims for black equality with biblical discourse as had been done in the antebellum period. Thus, recurring textual structures (biographies, prefaces, and introductions) within the publications were supported by narratives of equality. These narratives also aided the formation of an imagined community for the nineteenth-century reader and of a pantheon of heroes for later generations. The text within these publications represented

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<sup>159</sup> Washington “Introduction,” in *Women of Distinction*, ed. Scruggs (Raleigh, NC: E.M. Uzzell., 1892), xvii. The emphasis on the word “equal” was added by Washington.

<sup>160</sup> Majors, 188.

and reproduced middle-class identity but were also components in a discourse of dissent used to effect social change in the hostile social environment of Jim Crow. As I will explain in the next chapter, portraits in *Men of Mark*, *Afro-American Press*, *Noted Negro Women*, and *Women of Distinction* operate similarly and become visual representations of individuals as heroes and as members of an imagined community.

### Chapter Three: Portraits in African-American Illustrated Biographical Dictionaries

Considering once again Penn's willingness to forego some images as well as the fact that many biographies have no portrait accompanying them whatsoever (for instance, the biography of Phyllis Wheatley in Majors' *Noted Negro Women*), portraits within these books should be considered corroborative of biographical text. This is not to say, however, that without textual discourse the portraits are innocuous images. Art historians have demonstrated the theoretical complexity, pervasiveness, and versatility of portraiture, producing a considerable body of scholarship on the matter. Emphasized in much of this work is the role portraiture plays in identity formation as a tool used to register an individual's identity within a larger group.<sup>161</sup> For instance, incorporating principles from the work of semioticians such as Barthes, Pierce, Derrida, and Lacan, art historians Richard Brilliant and Shearer West provide examinations of how portraits form identity over generations of social groups or within psychologies of individuals. Brilliant states that the portrait is a "presentation of the self in the real world."<sup>162</sup> Accordingly, a portrait engages the theoretical framework of the "self" as a sign, or a constructed symbol with conceptual meaning, within the world. As something to be seen and to glean meaning from, it operates within a tripartite system of "reception," "production" and "reproduction" which an individual uses to perform an identity within

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<sup>161</sup> Richard Brilliant, *Portraiture* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991), 12; Shearer West, *Portraiture* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004). See also Marcia Pointon, *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England* (New Haven, CT: Published for the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art by Yale University Press, 1993), 13.

<sup>162</sup> Brilliant, 8.

social fields. Underscoring the social performativity associated with the genre, Marcia Pointon states that portraiture “indicates the centrality of being seen within politics and society, and suggests the invention of codes and forms of visual rhetoric through which a society theatricalizes itself.”<sup>163</sup> The process of identity formation by which portraits operate becomes much more forceful in other theorizations. Working from the Althusserian framework of interpellation, for example, Eric Garberson asserts that a portrait is “a constructed visual reference” that relates the represented individual to already formed categories but which also draws the individual into an “already-made” identity.<sup>164</sup>

Portraiture also maintains a central position in the history of art and in visual culture. West calls portraiture the “most familiar of art forms,” stating that it has been pervasive in human society throughout time and has been produced on or within various substrates and mediums.<sup>165</sup> Brilliant traces the development of the genre back to the Roman Empire claiming that the dominant conventions used to produce a portrait originated in Roman Art and stem from the Roman portrait bust.<sup>166</sup> Moreover, there is a tradition of privileging the head in visual culture that cuts across a plurality of cultures and against the Eurocentric view purported by Brilliant. Babatunde Lawal explains that the head is conceived of as the place of rule and order, or chaos and anarchy and is

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<sup>163</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 59.

<sup>164</sup> Eric Garberson, *Portraits, Categories, and Identity* (unpublished essay), 19.

<sup>165</sup> West, 14.

<sup>166</sup> Richard Brilliant, ‘On Portraits,’ *Zeitschrift für Ästhetik und Allgemeine Kunstwissenschaft*, XVI no. 1 (1971), 22.

related to the body public in Yoruba culture. This relationship is signaled by the metonymical phrases "head of state" or "seat of power," which denote a hierarchical organization of a complex social structure which, again, can occur in various cultures and geographies.<sup>167</sup>

The portrait as an image which represents the individual or a group of individuals is also significant in the formation of modern Western institutions. In *Hanging the Head: Portraiture and Social Formation in Eighteenth-Century England*, Marcia Pointon argues that during the early 1800s, when professional societies were forming in England, institutions used portraiture to depict their founders and to convey power to the public.<sup>168</sup> In her more recent work *Portrayal*, she goes further, stating that in "North American and European art portraiture occupies a default position as the art form of capitalist societies."<sup>169</sup> It has a deep-rooted connection to modern markets and cultures of consumption. Accordingly, its prominence within visual culture is tied to power and wealth and the desire to display both.

Portrait painters including Gilbert Stuart, Willson Peale, and John Singelton Copley are considered to be prominent actors in the visualization of American identity in the New Nation period, or at least of its governing body and of the upper-middle class. Scholars including Barbara E. Lacey, Susan Rather, Ellen Miles, and Christopher

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<sup>167</sup> Babatunde Lawal, "Ori: The Significance of the Head in Yoruba Sculpture," *Journal of Anthropological Research*, 41 no. 1 (spring, 1985): 91 – 103; *Embodying the Sacred in Yoruba Art* (Atlanta, GA: The High Museum of Art, 2008), 22; "Àwòrán: Representing the Self and Its Metaphysical Other in Yoruba Art," *The Art Bulletin*, 83 no. 3 (September, 2001): 501.

<sup>168</sup> Pointon, *Hanging the Head*, 27.

<sup>169</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 9.

Lukasik have illustrated the social impact of portraiture on the transfer of cultural capital and categories of identity over generations within antebellum America.<sup>170</sup> In “Public Portraits and Portrait Publics,” Valentijn Byvanck examines the pervasiveness of portraits in the Early Republic, when Americans produced the first illustrated biographical dictionaries. Taking the position that “the nineteenth-century [white] middle classes created a culture that revolved around representation,” he argues quite effectively that from the early Republic throughout the antebellum period Americans believed that portraits of leaders could elicit noble thoughts in viewers, thereby producing a better society.<sup>171</sup> As these historians have shown, portraiture is at the crux of identity formation and representation of the self within a larger social body and, more specifically, within the modern American nation. The genre of portraiture is indelibly connected to displays of social status, power, and prestige as well as to the economics of capitalist societies such as the United States.

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<sup>170</sup> For portraiture in the formation of American identity and portraiture, see the following: Barbara E. Lacey, “Visual Images of Blacks in Early American Imprints,” in *The Williams and Mary Quarterly*, Third Series vol. 53 no. 1 (1996):137 – 180; Susan Rather, “The Limner: Harry Croswell, Newspaper Politics, and the Portraitist as a Public Figure in the Early Republic” in *Shaping the Body Politic* ed. Maurie McInnis and Louis P. Nelson (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2011); Ellen Miles, “Fame and the Public Self in American Portraiture,” in *A Brush with History: Painting from the National Portrait Gallery* (Washington D.C.: National Portrait Gallery, 2001), 22 – 37. Miles makes the important claim that American portraiture, which as she shows was predominantly English in style, dominated American art production through the 1820s as politicians and the artists who depicted them borrowed ideology and visual idioms from the pseudoscience of phrenology mostly for political gain and to ascend in social rank.

<sup>171</sup> Byvanck, 199.

The place of the black subject in Western portraiture parallels the place of the American of visible African descent in the culture and society of America in general. The extensive work of *the Image of the Black in Western Art* and Agnes Lugo-Ortiz and Angela Rosenthal's more recent work *Slave Portraiture in the Atlantic World* make plain the place of black figures in Western portraiture.<sup>172</sup> Before Emancipation, blacks in portraits represented the "subordinated presence of the enslaved figure" which accentuated "the condition of possibility for the visual fantasy of masterly subjectivity granted to the white sitter."<sup>173</sup> Blacks depicted within the genre, especially before the periods of Emancipation, were usually enslaved individuals conveying to the viewer comparatively less agency than white subjects. The names of these black figures have often been forgotten or erased through a process of historical racism.<sup>174</sup>

However, art historian Deborah Willis explains that, starting with the introduction in 1839 of the daguerreotype, the first widely used photographic process, blacks represented themselves via photographic portraiture in order to "challenge the predominantly negative representations circulating" in visual culture.<sup>175</sup> Furthermore, in *Portraits of a People: Picturing African Americans in the Nineteenth Century*,

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<sup>172</sup> David Bindman et al., eds. *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, 3 vols. (New York: Belknap Press, 2010); Agnes Lugo-Ortiz and Angela Rosenthal, eds. *Slave Portraiture in the Atlantic World* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013).

<sup>173</sup> Agnes Lugo-Ortiz and Angela Rosenthal, "Introduction" in *Slave Portraiture*, ed. Agnes Lugo-Ortiz and Angela Rosenthal (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 4.

<sup>174</sup> Lugo-Ortiz and Rosenthal, 4.

<sup>175</sup> Willis, xix.



Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw convincingly shows that portraits of nineteenth-century African Americans were often produced to support Abolitionist ideology, as tools that contested enslavement. They “penetrated the superficialities of skin color” and promoted social equality.<sup>176</sup> Richard J. Powell advances this argument, asserting that the self-imaging and self-composure necessary in the production of black portraits make them intrinsically subversive to hostile social regimes such as those maintained in the Jim Crow South.<sup>177</sup> Such a position is rather reductive and is also indicative of the tendency seen within scholarship written by black art historians of earlier generations (Dr. Samella Lewis for instance) to highlight African-American cultural production as revolutionary. Acts of representation especially in the case of black self-representation in the United States, such as the portraits examined in this thesis, often reveal both subversion of and compliance to norms formed in broader social structures, for instance in the broader American society. They show interracial bonds of mutuality and not always abuse. To self-represent as a black subject is never entirely subversive nor is it ever entirely compliant. Black self-representation operates by a much more complex and nuanced process. Nonetheless, the central thread within these scholars’ work is that black self-imaging and the employment of modern technologies in that imaging was

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<sup>176</sup> Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw, *Portraits of a People: Picturing African Americans in the Nineteenth Century* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, with the Addison Gallery of American Art, 2006).

<sup>177</sup> Richard J. Powell, *Cutting a Figure: Fashioning Black Portraiture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2008). According to Powell, minorities who are portrayed in portraiture are mostly exceptions to dominant social constructs or dominant social hierarchies and have in some way accrued a good deal of social capital.

a form of cultural resistance to dominant power structures. Though self-representation and the adoption of modern American habitus had to be mediated through the parameters and racial strictures of the United States in order to avoid reprisal, the adornment, presentation, and re-presentation of the black self *and* the mass-reproduction of the black image became central to self-fashioning and self-representation as a form of cultural resistance.

Portraits in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries made after the Civil War represent nothing less than a pivotal shift in traditions of portraiture in Western Art and of representation in Western Visual Culture; still, they should be considered continuations of visual conventions formed within a tradition of Western Art, perhaps even as continuations of Western Art itself. Images of blacks in these books subvert stereotypes of the black within American society. What occurs, more specifically, is a presentation of the self through narrative, biography, and image as an act of cultural resistance; self-representation prevents or at least resists the elision of identity and dehumanization which occurred systemically in Western visual culture and especially in Jim Crow America. Because self-representation is inextricably bound to critical narratives of social equality in the books, portraiture confronted and inverted a visual social order in which racial hierarchies were traditionally promulgated via representations of black inferiority and erasures of black identity.

By including illustrations, “so that the reader may see the characters face to face,” Simmons and his fellow editors began a process of re-humanizing the black subject, better defining and, thus, making more precise the mass-image of the black in the nineteenth-century American imaginary. These were also syncretic images since the

black middle-class in the South was effectively a new social formation which borrowed cultural traditions, idioms, and habitus from American middle-class culture but also from traditions of Afro-Protestantism. More specifically, the appropriation of concepts of identity occurred at a formative moment in black middle-class culture so that the images within the books function as archetypes of black identity. Historical figures depicted within the books were among the first members of a recently formed social class which did not exist in the previous decades. They are representations of the first formation of the “New Negro,” a phenomenon of American modernity and of the New South, and are presented as models to all subsequent generations. Therefore, they are original patterns “from which copies are made.” Following the Greek *archetupos*, meaning “first-molded” and, further, *archeor* or “first” and *typos* or “stamp” or “impress,” the portraits work as archetypes in a material sense.<sup>178</sup> I also use the definition of an archive in the sense postulated by Michel Foucault in which an archive is the produced discourse in toto of a social group created to provide and to regulate its history, identity, and institutions.<sup>179</sup> As objects, the printed portraits are archetypal because they were some of the first forms of black self-representation to be reproduced by the new technologies of photography, electrotyping, facsimile wood engraving, and halftone printing. They were also the first to be collected within the recent medium of the industrial book. The very act of collecting the portrait as material object and binding it within an easily

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<sup>178</sup> "Archetype, n." in OED Online. September 2014. Oxford University Press.

<http://www.oed.com.proxy.library.vcu.edu/view/Entry/10344?redirectedFrom=archetype> (accessed September 24, 2014).

<sup>179</sup> Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge* (New York: Vintage, 1982).

consumed format meant that those responsible for the publications sought to form an archive of image and text that would oppose the archive of popular American culture that sought to represent blacks as inherently inferior to whites. Again, portraiture was presented to support biographical text in an attempt to moralize future generations and to shape historical discourse. It reproduced identity and preserved it, forming an archetypal archive of black middle-class identity, but was also employed to contest identity as well.

### Biographical Portraits, Archive, and Community

“In the pages of the Repository,” Delaplaine wrote on May 24, 1816, “pains have been taken and heavy expences [sic] incurred, to remedy the defect that exists in the writings of the ancient biographers.”<sup>180</sup> The defect of ancient biographers’ writing mentioned here was that portraits were not usually included in biographical dictionaries made before the nineteenth century. Delaplaine, who declared his publication to be “especially requisite in the United States,” intended it to combat a contemporary nineteenth-century discourse of American inferiority produced by Europeans.<sup>181</sup> He wrote that “It is well known that since the first colonization of the new world, efforts have been made by the writers of Europe, to degrade the character of the natives of America.”<sup>182</sup> These natives were Americans of European descent born on the North

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<sup>180</sup> Joseph Delaplaine, *Delaplaine's Repository of the Lives and Portraits of Distinguished Americans* (Philadelphia: Printed by William Brown, 1817), iii.

<sup>181</sup> Delaplaine, iv.

<sup>182</sup> Delaplaine, iv.

American continent who were considered by Europeans “to be inferior, both in body and intellect, to those who are born in the eastern hemisphere.”<sup>183</sup> In producing his dictionary, Delaplaine challenged this conception of American inferiority, writing in his preface that he wanted readers to engage in both a “fair comparison...between [Americans] and European characters” and in “a decision formed on grounds of justice.”<sup>184</sup> He understood his book to be an effective tool employed against conceptions of white American inferiority just as black editors conceived of their publications as a tool of cultural resistance, a physical object produced and employed against conceptions of African American inferiority.

Delaplaine also conceived of image and text in the *Repository* as significant in the formation of intergenerational American identity and as mutually synergistic: “While the text shall communicate to remote posterity what, at a former period, the leading men of America thought and performed,” he wrote, “the portraits...will give a view of their features and general aspect, their costume and air.”<sup>185</sup> Delaplaine undertook the expensive process of adding portraiture as visual representation to convey the appearance or semblance of a prominent person as he appeared to be and to aid biographical text. Portrait and text evoked in the reader both the interiority of prominent white leaders in Early America (their thoughts) and their visible class and gender performance (their actions). Thus, as Delaplaine stated, text conveyed what the individual “thought and performed,” image re-presented his “conveyed features and

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<sup>183</sup> Delaplaine, iv.

<sup>184</sup> Delaplaine, iii.

<sup>185</sup> Delaplaine, iii.

general aspects,” and in “the combined operation of the type and the graver...a correct image of the whole man be exhibited to view.”<sup>186</sup> As the recent work of literary historian Christopher Lukasik shows, the visualization of faces of prominent leaders in Early America such as those in Delaplaine’s repository helped “calibrate notions” either of leadership, public service, and civic virtue, or, conversely, of servitude and private service.<sup>187</sup>

Though Delaplaine edited the work during the New Nation period (1754 – 1820s) of American history and at the beginning of what historian Gordon Marshall calls “the biographical age,” when historical biographies became some of the most popular books in circulation, the *Repository* operates very similarly to later dictionaries produced by blacks in the New South.<sup>188</sup> Delaplaine sought to upend and subvert the conceptions of European supremacy prevalent in his time and wanted to provide visual evidence as counter argument against prevailing conceptions and stereotypes of Americans held by Europeans. However, whereas Delaplaine sought to destabilize the European supremacist order, Penn, Simmons, Majors, and Scruggs sought to destabilize white

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<sup>186</sup> Delaplaine, iii.

<sup>187</sup> Christopher Lukasik, “The Face of the Public,” *Early American Literature* 39, no. 3 (2004): 414 – 464.

<sup>188</sup> Gordon Marshall, “The Golden Age of Illustrated Biographical Biographies: Three Case Studies” in *American Portrait Prints: Proceedings of the Tenth Annual American Print Conference*, ed. Wendy Wick Reaves (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1984), 29. Marshall places the beginning of this period at 1815, three years after the War of 1812 and during a period of immense state and identity formation in the young American nation. As he writes, endemic during this period was a “thirst for self-improvement combined with a rising nationalism,” which drove the desire and consumption of illustrated biographical dictionaries. Marshall, 30.

American supremacist discourse. All of these editors combined image and text to better represent significant actors of social change within a larger social structure formed in part due to recent social revolution and violent conflict (The American Revolution and the War of 1812 in the former case and the Civil War and Jim Crow in the latter case) and because of the mass appropriation of already-formed modes of identity.

By conveying additional information to the reader, portraits in the four publications made the narrative of equality espoused by leaders of black America clearer. For instance, nearly all of the portraits depict the figure in three-quarter-profile, a popular mode of representation in the nineteenth century which, according to art historian Richard Brilliant, provides the greatest amount of visual information because it is a composite of both the side profile pose and the full-face pose. Accordingly, it conveys the most expression, and allows the viewer to glean more from the portrait.<sup>189</sup> These images are also usually busts. Another conventional mode of representation of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, a portrait bust is a portrait showing only the shoulders and head of the person portrayed. It allows the viewer to focus more on the face of the figure. A well-known and oft-reproduced three-quarter-pose portrait bust is American painter Charles Willson Peale's 1791 portrait of Thomas Jefferson as Secretary of State. (Fig. 4) Peale (1741 – 1827) whose work often depicted leaders of the American Revolution rendered the likeness of Jefferson with an air of significance and authority. Another, lesser-known example is the portrait of Columbus engraved by M. Maella. Maella re-presents Columbus in bust and armor for Delaplaine's *Repository*. The formal composition of the painted portrait of Jefferson and the printed portrait of

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<sup>189</sup> Brilliant, 43.

Columbus, the blank background and the averted gaze of the figures, are those used in the production of portraits of black Americans in biographical dictionaries. They are reminders of the exchange among portrait painters, early photographers, and engravers of the genre's conventions. (Fig. 4 and 5) In other words, like portraits of European figures, portraits of black figures calibrated notions of success, worth, and dignity.

As Shawn Michelle Smith notes, black leaders including W.E.B. Du Bois “solicited portraits of accomplished African Americans to serve as didactic models of racial uplift.”<sup>190</sup> She shows, for instance, that Du Bois and Thomas Calloway, a prominent black American lawyer and social activist, organized an exhibition of portraits of middle-class blacks at the American Negro Exhibit at the 1900 Exposition Universelle in Paris. Black photographer Thomas Askew produced many of these images at his studio in Atlanta, Georgia. In Paris, Du Bois and Calloway's exhibit included Askew's portraits as well as large format portraits of such black leaders as Blanche K. Bruce and Judson W. Lyons, both of whom served as Registrars of the Secretary, and of Booker T. Washington. It also contained sociological reports explicating the social progress of blacks and cultural objects from Hampton University and Tuskegee Institute.

Working from the theoretical framework proposed in Jacque Derrida's 1995 *Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression*, Smith notes that Dubois and Calloway assembled collections of black portraits to dispute dominant cultures of oppression and inequality and to maintain psychologies of resistance and to engage narratives of justice and equality. She examines the function of image and text which she argues worked

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<sup>190</sup> Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: WEB Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture* (Durham, NC: Duke University, 2004), 147.



together “as a counter archive that challenges a long legacy of racist taxonomy, intervening in turn-of-the-century ‘race-science’ by offering competing visual evidence.”<sup>191</sup> Portraits of blacks such as Washington and Bruce work within a complex counter archive, overlaid by narratives of justice and equality, in order to challenge “a long legacy of racist taxonomy.”<sup>192</sup>

Though Smith uses this definition to analyze W.E.B. Du Bois’ assembling of portrait photographs for the exhibit *Types of American Negroes, Georgia U.S.A. and Negro Life in Georgia, U.S.A.* at the 1900 Paris Exhibition, the terms counter archive and counter narrative provide useful insight into the production and operation of African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries. The portraits in *Men of Mark*, *Afro-American Press*, *Noted Negro Women*, and *Women of Distinction* also work to help form modern black middle-class identity and to repudiate spurious historical discourse and racism, thereby forming a counter narrative within a counter archive. As mass-produced cultural objects, they added to and strengthened the counter archive of images that question and critique dominant cultural archives comprised of such cultural products as *Birth of the Nation*, *Darktown Comics*, or Dunning School propaganda. For the most part, the portraits in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries operate in the same way as the portraits that Du Bois assembled. They were prints of “accomplished African Americans to serve as didactic models of racial uplift,” and they

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<sup>191</sup> Smith, 2.

<sup>192</sup> Smith, 2. See also Jacques Derrida and Eric Prenowitz, “Archive Fever: A Freudian Impression,” in *Diacritics* 25, no. 2 (Summer, 1995): 9 – 63.

challenged racist social structures.<sup>193</sup> However, because they are in books and because they were produced and reproduced earlier than those examined by Smith, the images within the biographical dictionaries operate differently than do those presented by DuBois and Calloway in 1900.

According to Marcia Pointon, portraits in books are often “annexed to the service of historical narratives.”<sup>194</sup> They frequently act “as a kind of portal to the reading of the written text,” allow the viewer to think of a narrative in a different, more precise manner, and are heuristic in that they aid in the formation of a mental short cut helping the reader absorb information more rapidly and making specific psychological space to help her, him, or them retain what has been consumed.<sup>195</sup> As objects within the material format of the mass-produced industrial book, they become much more difficult to erase, easier to preserve and to be referred to by members of later generations of African Americans such as myself, a student who went to a single archive in the architectural sense in order to access the counter archive and counter narratives within the books in a conceptual sense. Like Smith, Pointon incorporates Jacque Derrida’s postulation of the archive in her discussion of portraiture. For instance, she writes that “the portrait appended to the historical account might...be described as instantiating what Jacques Derrida proposed as the *'there* where things *commence* -- physical, historical, or ontological principle.”<sup>196</sup> The beginning of southern black middle-class identity is on

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<sup>193</sup> Smith, 147.

<sup>194</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 23 – 24.

<sup>195</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 9.

<sup>196</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 26.

display in the four dictionaries and helps form what would have been a never-before-seen imagined community. As material objects, these volumes and the portraiture and text within them are the “*there* where things commence.” They represent the beginning, or instantiation, of a once enslaved people who after the Reconstruction Acts, faced the attempted disavowal through legal disenfranchisement and violent coercion of that instantiation. Therefore, the books are where categories of identity and histories necessary in the formation of the Civil Rights Movement were first re-presented as image bound with text. They are the “*there* where things commence.”

Unlike Smith, however, Pointon brings together concepts of the archive with concepts of temporality, the existence and functions of an entity in time, and with concepts of materiality, the material existence of that entity in space. By connecting these concepts, she better explains the functionality of portraiture within books. According to Pointon, a portrait coupled to historical narrative, such as a biography, offers “an illusion of timelessness, the impression that we can know people other than ourselves.”<sup>197</sup> A reproduced portrait “works to endow the historical narrative with its illusion of a unified subject, serving simultaneously to monumentalize the status of knowledge in historical discourse.”<sup>198</sup> And it seems to close “the gap of time and space” between the reader and the subject portrayed.<sup>199</sup> Accordingly, the historical portrait refers back to a person at a particular period of time and appears to conflate the moments between the time the portrait was made and the time the portrait was seen.

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<sup>197</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 29.

<sup>198</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 26.

<sup>199</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 29.

The process of conflation is more powerful when biography and portraiture connect because a biography, like a portrait, must claim to be historical, individual, and representative. In fact, it is a collection of what the person who writes the biography believes are the most important periods, events, or acts of an individual's life and is therefore always an approximation. Biography works to take all events of a person's life and distill them into a streamlined personal narrative just as portraiture works to make a streamlined image of the person's identity within a larger social structure. Because portrait and biography are so similar, they work synergistically together to compress or to close "the gap of time and space" and produce a better-defined imagined community in the mind of the reader. This sense of conflation is especially powerful if the image is rendered with a great degree of naturalism and if it appears with a particularly revealing, expressive, or didactic biographical text; the face contains more markers of a person at a point in time and the biography contains more descriptions of a person's life.<sup>200</sup>

After considering the effect that portraiture in historical accounts has on conceptions of time, Pointon writes that "it is the materiality of the portrait as artefact, as well as its power as image, that makes it dangerous."<sup>201</sup> To articulate her point, Pointon incorporates the recent work of sociologist and theorist Bruno Latour and explains that a portrait connected to a history operates as what Latour has conceptualized as a "factish." A factish, according to Latour, combines the terms 'fact' and 'fetish,' and refers to a material product whose "work of fabrication has been twice added, canceling the

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<sup>200</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 27.

<sup>201</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 32.

twin effects of belief and knowledge.”<sup>202</sup> As a material object, a factish shows that there is no clear categorical division between fetishes and facts. Fetishes are created by humans, are conceived of as autonomous, and are used in belief systems. Facts are generally understood to be unconstructed and autonomous. However, as Latour shows, fact and fetish are both fabricated. People fabricate facts because of systems of belief, and people create fetishes knowing that they are actually fabricating fetishes. The fact that both are fabricated blurs distinctions between systems of knowledge and systems of belief.

According to Pointon, the historical portrait works as a factish because it “assumes many of the characteristics of the fetish as anthropologically and psychoanalytically defined: it is in the first place manufactured and in the second place it is that nothing-in-itself that constitutes a screen onto which fantasies are projected. At the same time it offers itself as fact both insofar as it exists materially as a trace from another time and place.”<sup>203</sup> Furthermore, it represents a reality that must be represented by means of technological fabrication but which cannot be fully represented and sometimes never fully understood.<sup>204</sup> As the works of Delaplaine, Simmons, Penn, Scruggs, and Majors show, historical portraits are considered to be indicative of truth or fact but are also connected to belief systems of equality which stemmed from Judeo-Christianity in the case of the African Americans’ works. Like most readers, these

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<sup>202</sup> Bruno Latour, *Pandora’s Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies* (Harvard University Press, 1999), 16.

<sup>203</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 32.

<sup>204</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 34.

editors likely did not know the exact processes by which the books and portraits were fabricated but still conceived of them as objects which would improve the social psychologies of people within their societies. In other words, the books were issued to operate autonomously of their creators and of the means by which they were produced. As factishes, or autonomous objects comprised of facts, they would make readers “act rightly.” Furthermore, portraits within *Men of Mark*, *Afro-American Press*, *Noted Negro Women*, and *Women of Distinction* work so efficiently as agents of social change because of readers’ desires to effect social change, because of their ability to access the books as material objects whose complex technological production is usually mysterious or at least unquestioned, and because of the reader’s ability to imbue them with meaning as a series of pre-formatted factishes which support and are supported by counter narratives within a larger counter archive.

When taken together, the biographies of blacks in the dictionaries, even if only in the form of a name, and the portraiture that corroborates these entries make the feeling of simultaneity necessary in the formation of an imagined community more forceful. The figures within the imagined community seemingly dictate and speak to the viewer as autonomous objects, as fetish. The sheer number of them makes the existence of the black middle class a reality and a fact, disturbing the dominant historical discourse of American society and the fact that social parity would never occur in the editors’ lifetimes. Moreover, the clearer the image and the more forceful the text, the stronger the portrait and text work to form a conception in the readers’ minds. Take for instance the halftone images in *Women of Distinction*, which are crisper than those in earlier books and have a considerably greater degree of verisimilitude than those in *Afro-*

*American Press* or in *Noted Negro Women*. They were reproduced by more recent and more developed halftone processes. As historian Neil Harris asserts, the greater degree of naturalism also leads the viewer to think of the portrait image as representing someone contemporaneous to the viewer's own time, of an extant and, indeed, responsive being. The halftones in *Women of Distinction* blur conceptual distinctions separating representation from reality; the figures' gazes may never meet the viewer's eyes but the viewer may now discern minute details of the figures' faces; eyes, expressive wrinkles, and deposits of subtle shadows on the cheeks, the sloping of mouths so close to animation and expression.

The halftone portrait works so well at conveying naturalism that the viewer is lured into viewing the image not as reproduction of life but as life itself; its attached narrative becomes more forceful, more exacting, and more instructive, better connoting what the reader ought to be. Comprised of hatch marks, curvilinear lines, and a large amount of negative space, for instance, the wood-engraved portrait of Ida B. Wells in *Noted Negro Women* operates as an approximate sketch. (Fig.) The halftone of Wells in *Women of Distinction*, on the other hand, operates through the process of timelessness, as a figure who will "impress her personality upon the time" with "all the future hers."<sup>205</sup> Though both portraits depict Wells as a young adult woman, if the viewer examines the linear wood engraving of Wells and then the halftone what occurs is Harris' "experience of visual reorientation." A closer relationship between viewer and image forms between the latter image and the viewer. The relationship is illusory of course, but, nonetheless, it makes the portrait work with authority in the formation of identity and in the calibration

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<sup>205</sup> Scruggs, 39.

of the self within a group. Wells seems to speak her narrative with greater definition and increased volume so that her clarion call against lynching is recognized with increased clarity now that it is aided by the halftone,.

### Blurring Middle-Class Identity, Selected Portraits and Text

Mass-produced portraiture provided members of the African-American middle class an additional tool of self-representation used in the formation of liberation discourse and in a movement identity. Portraits in the four volumes work to preserve the faces of African-Americans in Jim Crow as signs of exterior identity. They assist the life narratives, accomplishments, and political views of nineteenth-century Americans whose voices were often marginalized and whose very existence is often left in obscurity, overshadowed by dominant discourse or threatened by the violence of Jim Crow. As I will show in this section, the portraits operate as visual devices of identity preservation and identity destabilization when bound with protest texts and affirmative texts.<sup>206</sup>

In Antebellum America, the imaging of oneself in portraiture provided evidence of a subject's ascension in social rank. Byvanck writes, for instance, that portraiture illustrated "a powerful middle-class aspiration to express its newly-won political and financial status in a visual lineage" for both blacks and whites.<sup>207</sup> In the minds of nineteenth- and twentieth-century black leaders, immersed in nineteenth- and twentieth-century constructs of material progress, the portrait and later the portrait photograph

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<sup>206</sup> Carroll, 81.

<sup>207</sup> Byvanck, 213.



worked as a democratizing medium which could induce and display social change.<sup>208</sup> Frederick Douglass lauded portrait photography in his 1863 speech “Pictures and Progress.” He stated that a “servant girl can now see a likeness of herself, such as noble ladies and even royalty itself could not purchase fifty years ago” and that “like education and a thousand other blessings brought to us by the advancing march of civilization, such pictures, are placed within easy reach of the humblest members of society.”<sup>209</sup> Anticipating the work of recent scholars, Douglass noted the portrait photograph’s ability to conflate the culture of social rank by bringing together the “noble” and “humble” individuals of his society as equals.

Theorists and scholars such as Richard Bolton, Esther Parada, Graham Clarke, Jacques Rancière, Susan Sontag, Alan Trachtenberg, and Allen Sekula have all emphasized the role of the portrait as a device that is socially subversive and that fluctuates between dominance and democratization.<sup>210</sup> Again, Pointon declares that

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<sup>208</sup> Willis, x. See also Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith, “Introduction: Pictures and Progress,” in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, ed. Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 2.

<sup>209</sup> Frederick Douglass, “Pictures and Progress,” Frederick Douglass Papers at the Library of Congress, available at <http://lcweb2.loc.gov/ammem/doughtml/dougFolder5.html>. Quoted first in Donna M. Wells, “Frederick Douglass and the Progress of Photography” (Moorland-Spingarn Center: Howard University, 2000), 1. <http://www.huarchivesnet.howard.edu/0002huarnet/freddoug.htm>.

<sup>210</sup> Richard Bolton, “Introduction,” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography* ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), xii; Esther Parada, “C/Overt Ideology: Two Images of Revolution,” in Bolton, *Contest of Meaning*, 221 - 259. Graham Clarke, “Introduction,” in *The Portrait in Photography*, ed. Graham Clarke (London: Reaktion Books, 1992), 3; Jacques Rancière, *The Future of*

portraiture is “an unstable, de-stabilizing, and potentially subversive art through which uncomfortable and unsettling convictions are negotiated.”<sup>211</sup> Contrary to the conception that portraiture stabilizes or calibrates identity, Pointon’s statement calls attention to the ability of portraiture to expand and disrupt categories of identity that are commonly held within a society. In *The Portrait in Photography*, Graham Clarke states that portrait photographs are fundamentally enigmatic because they are essentially representations of identity, itself a porous construct. He is correct in stating that the portrait photograph “has the status of a signature and declares itself as an authentic present,” but also “displaces, rather than represents, the individual.”<sup>212</sup> Both Pointon and Clarke’s statements make it harder to show a positive correlation between a person’s ascension in social rank and the choice to represent oneself with portraiture. In other words, if portraiture is unstable and actually displaces the individual, as Pointon and Clark argue, the connection of image to social ascension is called into question.

Allan Sekula's essay “The Body and the Archive” provides a particularly important framework for much of the following discussion.<sup>213</sup> Drawing from Michel Foucault’s theory of the archive, Sekula demonstrates that the portrait photograph

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*the Image* (London: Verso, 2007); Susan Sontag, “America, Seen Through Photographs, Darkly,” in *On Photography* (New York: Noonday Press, 1977), 27 - 48; Alan Trachtenberg, *Reading American Photographs: Images as History, Mathew Brady to Walker Evans* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982); Allen Sekula “The Body and the Archive” in *The Contest of Meaning: Critical Histories of Photography*, ed. Richard Bolton (Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 1989), 343 - 379.

<sup>211</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 9.

<sup>212</sup> Clarke, 1.

<sup>213</sup> Sekula, 343 - 379.

displays the honorific and criminalizing, the liberating bourgeois values and the repressive legal functions of society. “To the extent that bourgeois order depends upon the systematic defense of social relations,” Sekula argues “, every proper portrait has its lurking, objectifying inverse in the files of the police.”<sup>214</sup> The portrait photograph represents the mutual dependency of criminal identity and middle-class identity in the age of modernity and celebrates values held by dominant authoritative cultures. It also is a tool in the policing of those whose values lie outside dominant and authoritative cultures.<sup>215</sup> Thus, the portrait photograph works within a “double system: a system of representation capable of functioning both *honorifically* and *repressively*.”<sup>216</sup> It can, in other words, be used to depict moral exemplars or to aid in the recording of the criminal members of a society. Furthermore, as Sekula claims, what forms from both criminal and honorific images are two distinct archives; the honorific archive and the criminal archive which function mutually in that without conceptions of criminal identity, middle-class identity would not exist and without middle-class identity, criminal identity would not exist.

Another important theoretical framework conceptualized by Sekula is the portrait photograph as productive of an inherent tension between the viewer’s individual identity and the viewer’s group identity. The portrait photograph is accordingly a place where an individual begins a process of social calibration within a social hierarchy. In Sekula’s words, it is where the individual takes “a look up, at one’s ‘betters,’ and a look down, at

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<sup>214</sup> Sekula, 346.

<sup>215</sup> Sekula, 343.

<sup>216</sup> Sekula, 346.

one's 'inferiors.'"<sup>217</sup> However, as I argue, the inclusion of critical discourse supporting social equality with a portrait representing a member of the middle class must alter that social calibration. A viewer who examines the portraits within these dictionaries, for instance, also reads text which dictates that the process of looking up at superiors and looking down at inferiors is not only arbitrary but is also morally wrong. The tension within these images does not necessarily stem from the process of hierarchy formation to which Sekula refers because the reader, when viewing a portrait, is also instructed to avoid and to be critical of such a look because that look has occurred because of systemic oppression. I propose that in order to find the tension within the portraits of black biographical dictionaries, we must analyze the historical formation of archetypal categories of American identity. When examining the historical emergence of the category of identity known as the "American middle-class," for instance, we find that it operates in opposition to but also as a result of the category of racial identity called "black." The result of this dependent oppositionality is a tense, dialectical relationship of black identity and American middle-class identity that must be considered in interpretations of portraits of nineteenth-century and even twentieth-century blacks. Such a relationship means that images of blacks whose experiences in some way reflects or engages middle-class experiences are sites of intense conflict *and* resolution and that they destabilize and re-affirm concepts of nineteenth-century middle-class identity which depended on social inequality.

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<sup>217</sup> Sekula, 347.

Stuart Blumin, author of *The Emergence of the Middle Class: Social Experience in the American City, 1760 – 1900*, states that, when we speak of the American middle-class, we refer to a common social experience that is a product of “a shift in the nature of inequality.”<sup>218</sup> This shift is more precisely the transition from the “personalized, face-to-face hierarchies of the eighteenth century” to “the more distant, categorical hierarchies of the nineteenth century.”<sup>219</sup> According to Blumin, it was in the 1830s that Americans, who had used terms such as “middling” to describe their status, began to identify themselves as middle-class. Being in the middle-class meant having a nonmanual or clerical occupation, relative social independence, often working in an environment separated from industrial or manual production, associating with others in the middle-class, and living in or around an urban center. Another significant requirement was the purchasing or receiving of new consumer goods including homes, clothing, or other novel objects such as photographs. All of these experiences, and especially the act of consuming novel products, helped place an individual in what Blumin calls a new “culture of rank,” a social spectrum of inequality marked on one end by the ability to consume a relatively large array of novel goods and on the other by the inability to consume any at all.<sup>220</sup> Accordingly, what historians call the American middle-class is actually a sum of many modern social experiences dependent largely on nineteenth-century social inequality and cultures of consumption.

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<sup>218</sup> Blumin, 231.

<sup>219</sup> Blumin, 231.

<sup>220</sup> Blumin, 10.

Though Blumin does not go so far as to acknowledge the relationship, middle-class identity depended on the socio-economic and socio-cultural institution of slavery, which in turn depended on the concept of racial difference. Historian Eric Foner writes that an increase in the demand for consumer goods "fueled the rapid growth of the Atlantic slave trade" while the "centrality of slavery [economic growth] encouraged an ever-closer identification of freedom with whites and slavery with blacks."<sup>221</sup> According to Foner, before the 1660s, enslaved blacks and white indentured servants held similar social standing and maintained relatively fluid relationships. After the 1660s, concepts of race changed drastically. "Not until the 1660s," Foner writes, "did the laws of Virginia and Maryland explicitly refer to slavery."<sup>222</sup> Synthesizing the general understanding held by historians, he goes on to state that "ideas about innate racial difference developed slowly in seventeenth-century America" so that even some blacks "gained their freedom after a fixed term of labor."<sup>223</sup> Facing a decrease of poor white labor from Europe, wealthy whites wrote laws that effectively stratified society on the basis of race so that blacks were forced to labor in perpetuity and as chattel. Blacks were consigned to a life of involuntary manual labor in mostly rural environments. They could not easily attain non-manual occupations, they had less access to novel consumer goods, and their bodies were not their own legal possessions but were owned by slave owners. As a result of the coupling of blackness to servility, whites assumed a privileged position in American society, gained access to greater social mobility, and could more easily

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<sup>221</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 7.

<sup>222</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 8.

<sup>223</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 8.

subscribe to a middle-class identity of independence.<sup>224</sup> The elements that formed the common experience of the American middle-class in the nineteenth-century occurred because of the enforcement of racial difference through systemic racism.

Even after Emancipation, the concept of racial hierarchy and white supremacy further supported the growth of the American middle-class. In his *Rebirth of the Nation: 1877 - 1920*, T.J. Jackson Lears states that the modern dream of American abundance starting in the 1870s stemmed from “a solid faith” in “Anglo-Saxon supremacy.”<sup>225</sup> Lynching, convict-lease systems, gerrymandering, segregation, and unequal access to education all intensified after Emancipation. To be sure, the experiences of the majority of blacks before and after the Civil War completely contrasted the middle-class American experience. Therefore, to call for equality and to be a social activist as a nineteenth-century black middle-class person was both rare and paradoxical. On the one hand, this call was rare because the overwhelming majority of blacks in nineteenth-century America experienced a life that completely contrasted the middle-class experience and could not make such a call amplified by industrial print and mass-reproduction. On the other hand, it was paradoxical since any member of the American middle-class who espoused a narrative of equality and then acted upon this narrative tore at the very foundations of their identity, the newly formed American culture of rank supported by concepts of social inequality.

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<sup>224</sup> Foner, *Forever Free*, 9.

<sup>225</sup> Lears, 91.

According to art historian Deborah Willis, portraits of blacks before the Civil War were either depictions of freed people “who could afford to pay for their likenesses” or were depictions of the enslaved, who were “often photographed by their owners to identify them as human property.”<sup>226</sup> For Willis, the former category includes portraits of Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth, and Harriet Tubman who were all fugitives or run-aways and portraits of lesser-known blacks including Urias Africanus McGill and Sarah McGill Russwurm, abolitionists and members of the nineteenth-century Colonization Movement.<sup>227</sup> Their portraits represent people of African descent who were relatively free from the dominant social and economic structure of the United States but who also produced a narrative of equality. In this way, they connote agency, humanization, independence, and militate against the idea of black servility while engaging concepts of middle-class-ness. However, as material objects these photographs are consumer goods and are, therefore, products of slavery. The invention of the various methods of photographic reproduction in the nineteenth century would not have occurred without the consolidation of capital which depended on trans-Atlantic slavery that formed in the seventeenth- eighteenth- and nineteenth-century geographies connecting Africa, Europe, and the Americas. Yet, the discourses of equality produced by these individuals contrast the oppressive and oligarchic systems of inequality within American society where whites considered blacks inferior and where blacks were subjected disproportionately to psychological, verbal, sexual, physical, and financial abuses for the

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<sup>226</sup> Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2005), 2.

<sup>227</sup> Willis and Krauthamer, 44 - 45.



sake of institutional growth, white supremacy, and cultures of consumption. Portraits of the black middle-class in the nineteenth-century were, therefore, counter-hegemonic methods of destabilizing, restructuring, and expanding categories of identity. They depict individuals who did not fully comply with dominant power structures, who were critical of them, and who sought to dismantle, improve, or at least resist them. Because the portraits follow Western conventions of representation, they also reinstalled categories of middle-class identity in that they reproduced, at least partially, idioms of middle-class culture including acceptable representation.

The portraits in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries are illustrative of nineteenth-century Victorian habitus, connoting the subjects' respectability through the denotative function of bourgeois dress. They underscore social position within modern American culture as well as a shared social awareness and experience appropriated from the American middle class which, according to Blumin, formed in the 1830s. As representations that denote social rank, the images share the formal elements of other eighteenth- and nineteenth-century portraits such as Charles Willson Peale's 1791 portrait painting of Thomas Jefferson or M. Maella's printed portrait of Christopher Columbus in Delaplaine's *Repository*. Set within auras of diagonal lines and with subjects' gazes averted from the viewer, for instance, the images connote social distance from other African Americans who were not members of the black American middle class and who were judged as not worthy enough to be represented in the books. In this way, they operate similarly to Jefferson and Columbus' portraits, which connote separation from individuals and groups (Africans and Indigenous Americans,

for instance) who were considered inferior to the figures and to the figures' respective social groups.

However, connected to a critical discourse of equality, the portraits and their portrait conventions operate quite differently than those of Jefferson and Columbus. For instance, with critical text, the blankness behind the portrait operates as a void, as a space that simultaneously contextualizes and represents, as well as decontextualizes and elides. It can be interpreted as the space needed for social change where identity is simultaneously blurred, expanded, and concretized. This space momentarily mutes the systems of oppression, inequality, and cultures of rank which the black leaders addressed in their critical discourse when they called attention to the systems of injustice. The space connotes social distinction and hierarchy in one instance. Yet, in another, it represents the space in which social change is performed and equality is achieved.

Considering the oppressive regimes and apparatuses of Jim Crow, lynching, American eugenics, the chain gang, and sharecropping, the blankness must also be seen as that space mentioned by Sekula, which surrounds a criminal or deviant member of a social group considered ill or lowly, an individual who is to be monitored, quarantined, or killed so that reproduction of these individuals does not occur. These understandings of criminality and deviance are predicated on an epistemology that privileges conditions of heredity and ethnic purity as the means to social betterment. As Sekula notes, it stems from nineteenth-century discourses of physiognomy and phrenology, appearing in its most ignoble form as the eugenics movement.<sup>228</sup> In

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<sup>228</sup> Sekula, 367.

these books, the collection of portraits representing people who appear to be Americans of strictly European descent with those of people who appear to be strictly of African descent destabilizes conceptions of racial purity and heredity. Identity is further blurred, and the blankness behind the portraits highlights the figures' deviance, resistance, opposition, middling social rank, and assimilation all at once.

Furthermore, it is with narrative that they operate collectively as a counter archive in opposition to dominant images and also signal liberation of the formerly enslaved. As Marcia Pointon suggests, a portrait of a nineteenth-century black person accompanied with a signature or a name denotes manumission.<sup>229</sup> Speeches and biographical accounts from the lives of Richard Allen, Frederick Douglass, Ida B. Wells, and Thomas Wiggins, a blind pianist from Georgia, are encountered after the portraits are viewed. They operate in a relationship that Pointon calls a “symbiosis of portrait and biography.” The narratives of social justice and equality join with the middle-class portraits, causing a tension and then a rupture on the surface of the page. Critical discourses better contrast the social stratification on which middle-class identity and the existence of the portraits as material objects rest.

A wood-engraved portrait of Frederick Douglass (b. 1818 – 1895) printed in *Men of Mark* and another wood-engraved portrait of Richard Allen (b. 1760 – 1831) in *Afro-American Press* are representative of this inherent tension between middle-class identity and images of blacks. Allen and Douglass were both urban-dwelling, middle-class black men who had non-manual occupations and were social activists. Born a slave in 1760 in Philadelphia, Richard Allen was an influential abolitionist and the first

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<sup>229</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 59.

bishop and a founder of the African Methodist Episcopal Church, the first formal and independent Christian church in the United States for people of African descent. Upon his death in 1831, he had produced a wealth of discourse that inspired later social activists including Frederick Douglass. The image of the leader, which had been reproduced widely, was placed within a larger block of text describing the 1856 formation of *the Christian Recorder*.<sup>230</sup> The block of text surrounding the portrait of Allen, reads “It was established as the official organ of the A.M.E. Church and had manfully fought the fight. Its heroic efforts in the days of slavery for Abolition, are well known to the Afro-American student of times and events.”<sup>231</sup> The official organ, the instrument which held within it the ideology of the A.M.E. Church, began after Allen died but the placement of his image within text related to the *Recorder* bolsters narratives of justice while maintaining a lineage that starts with contemporary students and goes back to the former leader as well as to the formerly enslaved. So, while Allen died a quarter of a century before the establishment of the *Recorder*, by placing the picture of Allen into a textual description of the 1856 periodical, the editors connected the ideology of a founding member to a literary discourse that had been produced and edited by blacks in subsequent generations.

The wood-engraved portrait of Frederick Douglass sits above the honorific title “Frederick Douglass.” and across from another nominal label “Hon. Frederick Douglass, LL. D. Magnetic Orator – Anti-slavery Editor – Marshal of the District of Columbia –

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<sup>230</sup> The Christian Herald is now the oldest extant black periodical in the U.S. It still supports ideologies of equality, blurring the lines between secular concerns and religious ones.

<sup>231</sup> Penn, 79.

Recorder of Deeds of the District of Columbia – First Citizen of America – Eminent Patriot and Distinguished Republican.” After the portraits and brief verbal descriptions, Simmons includes a biographical summary of the figure’s life which describes a narrative not very different from what one would read in Douglass’ 1881 autobiography *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass*. There is then an exposition provided to make clear the “great deal of speculation as to what connection Frederick Douglass had with the John Brown Raid.” John Brown’s Raid was a failed seizure of a United States arsenal and an attempted slave revolt led by white abolitionist John Brown from October 16<sup>th</sup> to October 18<sup>th</sup>, 1859. Eighty-eight United States marines and members of the Virginia and Maryland militias led by General Robert E. Lee, who would command the Confederate Army, battled sixteen white abolitionists, three black men who were born free, a black man who had gained freedom, and a black man who was a fugitive. After the raid, ten revolutionaries were killed, seven were captured, and five escaped. John Brown was captured, found guilty of treason against the Commonwealth of Virginia, and hanged in December. “I John Brown,” the condemned leader wrote before his execution, “am now quite certain that the crimes of this guilty, land: will never be purged away; but with Blood.” A search for enslaved blacks and fugitive slaves commenced, and Frederick Douglass, who attempted to deter Brown, was implicated as a key actor in the event. Virginia Governor George Henry Wise wrote a confidential requisition of arrest for Brown. Simmons included it in *Men of Mark*:

“I have information such as has caused me, upon proper affidavits, to make requisition upon the Executive of Michigan for the delivery up of the person of Frederick Douglass, a Negro man, supposed now to be in Michigan, charged

with murder, robbery and inciting servile insurrection in the State of Virginia. My agents for the arrest and reclamation of the person so charged are Benjamin M. Morris and William N. Kelly. The latter has the requisition and will wait on you to the end of obtaining nominal authority as postoffice [sic] agents. They need to be very secretive in this matter, and some pretext of traveling through the dangerous section for the execution of the laws in this behalf, and some protection against obtrusive, unruly or lawless violence.”

When Wise wrote the requisition, Douglass was in England promoting the abolition of American slavery and had never committed murder though he had stolen as a hungry, enslaved child and probably incited resistance because of his critical discourse.<sup>232</sup> Nonetheless, when Wise wrote the document, it was symbolic of the Governor’s authority as head of the state. It made his power and rank legible. The words “confidential,” servile,” “requisition,” “agents,” “nominal authority,” and “affidavit” signify his authority within the Commonwealth. “Servile” and “Negro” connote a social hierarchy in which enslaved blacks were chattel. Like a portrait photograph, Wise’s requisition operates simultaneously to police and to honor, seeking to protect and to punish; it presents authority over the fugitive body and attempts to suppress subsequent resistance or revolution. It seeks to render obedient and subservient a black leader and a larger social body in evoking the law.

The document loses its validity all together in *Men of Mark*, however. Wise’s authority is first called into question because Simmons revokes its confidentiality in two

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<sup>232</sup> Simmons, 71.

ways, making transparent what was once obscure. First, the editor implies that Douglass knew of the requisition and states that he “did not feel it necessary to hasten his return on account of this interesting document.” Second, Simmons reprinted it in a book circulated throughout the black middle-class. Mass production here strips the letter of both its validity and of confidentiality. In antebellum America and during American slavery, Wise’s correspondence was a display of authority and state surveillance. It was symbol of his ability to omit discourse but to retain power and to elide identity even with omission. It turned an innocent, definite, well-known, and old subject (the elderly Douglass would die twelve years after Simmons’ publication), into an indefinite subject within an ageless, criminal, and subordinate group: “a Negro...charged with murder [and] robbery.” Simmons’ appropriation of the requisition serves to subvert Wise’s authority as head of state. The text works here not only to blur the identity of Wise. It works to re-define and re-support Frederick Douglass’ identity which Wise attempted to make indefinite and in fact to erase through a likely execution. Simmons includes Wise’s text to show that state authority and identity as head of state was both arbitrary and false.<sup>233</sup>

Tom Bethune’s image in *Men of Mark* started as a portrait photograph copyrighted in 1880 by the Georgia anti-abolitionist and attorney John G. Bethune.<sup>234</sup> In Simmons’ volume Bethune is described as “The Musical Wonder of the Age,” “The Negro Pianist,” and “A Remarkable Musician.” The beginning of his biography reads:<sup>235</sup>

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<sup>233</sup> Simmons, 71.

<sup>234</sup> Simmons, 794.

<sup>235</sup> Simmons, 794.

“The musical world for centuries has known such great composers as Mendelssohn, Haydn, Mozart and Beethoven, but far surpassing these may be named the poor little Negro boy, Thomas Bethune, born May 25, 1849, in Columbus, Georgia. Thomas was born blind and as the beauties of nature could only be revealed to him through hearing, and retained by the power of memory and imitation, these faculties were cultivated almost to perfection. Young Bethune is the embodiment of music, and in this art his powers know no limits.”<sup>236</sup>

An autistic savant and piano prodigy whose name was actually Thomas Green Wiggins, Wiggins was owned by Bethune before Emancipation. Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, whose recent work has brought Wiggins from obscurity, write that leading “up to the Civil War, the annual revenue from Wiggins’ concerts and the sale of his sheet music reached \$100,000 equivalent today to \$1.5 million per year.”<sup>237</sup> After the Civil War, John G. Bethune “had a Virginia probate judge declare Tom mentally incompetent and name Bethune’s son John as Wiggins’ new legal guardian.”<sup>238</sup> After Emancipation, Bethune continued as Wiggins’ manager until the late 1880s. Because of his authority before and after the Civil War in the Wiggins’ life, Bethune amassed a fortune. Wiggins’ identity as black subject was one of dependence in both the antebellum period and Jim Crow. Wiggins has only recently been

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<sup>236</sup> Simmons, 794.

<sup>237</sup> Henry Louis Gates Jr. and Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham eds., *African American Lives* (Oxford University Press, 2004), 85.

<sup>238</sup> Gates and Higginbotham, 85.



acknowledged as a musical genius so that his obscurity in the history of music makes the inclusion of his portrait in Simmons' *Men of Mark* both an act of subterfuge and an act of preservation; portrait and biography metaphorically snatch Wiggins from obscurity and from dependency. The reproduction of text and image here is social revolution through symbolic reclamation and reformation, through bringing independence to a figure who never truly had it, whose identity, name, and image, were manipulated to bring profit to white master cum white manager, and whose selfhood, as deviant subject, was proscribed before and after Emancipation; even as an adult after Emancipation, Wiggins was a legal dependent. To be sure, the image was a portrait bound first to black oppression and to the oppression of an individual with a mental condition considered aberrant. It was no self-imaged portrait, but it was re-imaged and re-presented as such in *Men of Mark*.

The binding together of once-dominant text such as Wise's once-confidential correspondence with critical discourse produces a position of cultural plurality. The creation and retooling of revisionist reality by the careful selection and copying of facts and even fiction on which the portrait is often overlaid is evinced by the re-appropriation of Wiggins' portrait, which had been for nearly a century after its reproduction lost in obscurity along with Wiggins' biography. Both portraits decentralize narrative and identity, showing their arbitrariness. The portrait as not quite fetish and not quite fact operates within a cultural archive of oppositionality and resistance. The relationship between portraiture of the black middle-class and critical narratives allows a space for counterhegemonic discourses and, thus, social democracy so that portraiture and text

become tools used paradoxically to expand categories of middle-class identity and to conflate the hierarchies implicit within them.

Black leaders sought to destabilize and resist the power structures of white supremacist institutions, which elided the distinction and progress of blacks after Reconstruction and which produced dominant archives within which existed images of blacks frozen within a subordinate social rank. In fact, the portrait aids the formation of a movement identity, especially when we understand the advent of the Civil Rights Movement as first gaining momentum in the grassroots and relying on regional identities formed mostly in the South and the significance portraiture had as an intergenerational and corroborative mode of representation connected indelibly to textual representation such as biography or to other modes of expression such as song. The “much-multiplied” images affect and determine how historical discourse is presented and preserved.<sup>239</sup> They serve readers as metonymic and heuristic devices so that portraiture and biography of Frederick Douglass become representative of and refer to the anti-slavery movement while portraiture and biography of Ida B. Wells perform a similar function in relation to the anti-lynching campaign of the twentieth-century. Accordingly, one purpose of the portraits in the dictionaries is to render metonymically the complex social networks of activists and community leaders fundamental in social change in order to more easily convey a portion of American history, albeit in a simplified fashion.

The images in these volumes operate within what art historian Shawn Michelle Smith calls counter narrative and a counter archive and help reproduce and, thus, better

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<sup>239</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 24.

define quasi-constant categories of identity such as the black newspaper editor, the black religious leader, and the black actor. Furthermore, they work symbiotically with text to make the formation of an imagined community more powerful, rapid, and well-defined in the mind of the reader. As such effective images underpinned by counter narrative (the narrative of the lives of blacks within a larger social body), they preserve identity but destabilize it as well and become effective implements of nineteenth-century social change and subversion. In the volumes of *Men of Mark*, *Afro-American Press*, *Women of Distinction* and *Noted Negro Women*, portraiture, as visual discourse, works with biography, as verbal discourse, allowing a fuller understanding of social movements (Social Gospel) and social traditions (Afro-Protestantism) which labelled the systemic causes of inequality, racist discourse, and unethical treatment pervasive in the United States after the Civil War as arbitrary, unjust, and real but really socially constructed. In oscillating from preservation to transformation, from identity formation to social change, from protection from a backlash against freedom (fetish) to evidence of freedom (fact) the individual images and disparate biographies helped form a collective identity for the black middle class that opposed dominant power-structures in a critical, destabilizing manner. Such a process would be fundamental in the development of social psychologies, individual identities, and broader cultures needed to make the Civil Rights Movement successful.

## Conclusion:

African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries are objects with immense cultural significance, engaging social movements of cultural resistance which extended across social fields and times.<sup>240</sup> That the paradoxical environment of New South democracy and Jim Crow oppression prompted the production of these books cannot be overlooked. Blacks perceived the image and text within the publications as necessary tools in highlighting and protecting social progress and social history while underscoring the efficacy of cultural resistance. Presented, preserved, and stabilized by portraiture and biography, the narratives of equality, truth, and justice form a complex yet overtly confrontational discourse, a counter narrative in the words of Shawn Michelle Smith, which were once conveyed orally in enslaved black communities but which were now reproduced in print through the industrial processes of a modernizing nation. To cite Marcia Pointon again, a portrait offers "an illusion of timelessness, the impression that we can know people other than ourselves" while "closing the gap of time."<sup>241</sup> The mass-produced images in these works made the formation of imagined communities more efficient and more vivid because of the processes of memorialization, the recognition of the dead or the obscure, which portraiture induces in the viewer. They bring the dead or the distant to life. Portraiture not only stimulated the formation of a better-defined imagined community but also counteracted trends of historical elision that the black middle class faced in the late nineteenth century. They become components

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<sup>240</sup> Brooks, 51.

<sup>241</sup> Pointon, *Portrayal*, 28 - 29.

in a social history helping to blur and concretize identity simultaneously. Image and text oscillate between continuity and change, between tradition and progress.

Portraits in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries also cut across what Sekula calls “zones of deviance and respectability,” if they do not expose them as entirely arbitrary altogether. They do not fit so squarely into the two zones, which Sekula argues “establish and delimit the terrain of the other.”<sup>242</sup> Instead and in order to allow cultural space for social change, they serve to fragment them. With critical text, they are evidence used to show the arbitrariness of the criminal and the bourgeois by simultaneously blurring and defining those categories of identity. Still, as Sekula writes, they work to “prevent the cancellation” of marginalized narratives by the testimonies of “more authoritative and official texts.”<sup>243</sup> In this light, Irvine Garland Penn wrote that books like his had already “proven a power in the promotion of truth, justice and equal rights for an oppressed people” and that readers could not “fail to recognize some achievement won by that people, the measure of whose rights is yet being questioned.”<sup>244</sup> Penn’s words are written to oppose and to resist dominant, authoritative discourses that were produced to erase or to obscure from the collective memory of the American nation the actual successes of black Americans during the late-nineteenth century. In the sense that Penn wrote in opposition to false conceptions of blacks as permanently stagnant within a period of American modernity, the statement mandates a reevaluation of the black American’s place in American society.

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<sup>242</sup> Sekula, 350 - 351.

<sup>243</sup> Sekula, 379.

<sup>244</sup> Penn, *The Afro-American Press*, first page of preface. This portion of the volume is not paginated.

Neither Penn nor any of the other editors ever mutes the political and ethical obstacles which did in fact impede black Americans. They combine a text of criticality, a text issued on behalf of an oppressed people to show the ethical failure of a nation, while highlighting and re-presenting the successes of individuals despite such oppression. To do this was to call attention to constructed absences and actual denigrations, on the one hand, but to underscore the ability to augment and to surmount them on the other. To use literary historian Anne Elizabeth Carroll's terms, African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries are comprised of both "protest texts," critical texts that expose the social ills of the American nation calling attention to the fallacies of criminal identity, and of "affirmative texts," texts that laud the progress of black America and the achievements of its leaders through the honorific format of biography.<sup>245</sup> The portraits in *Men of Mark*, *Afro-American Press*, *Women of Distinction* and *Noted Negro Women* gave editors of color one additional tool with which they could protest the social oppression endemic in nineteenth- and twentieth-century America while lauding their accomplishments despite such oppression.

Such a combination of text and image illustrates the capacity of an individual or a group to assert agency and to resist historical erasure within an oppressive system which seeks to elide truth and to negate the significance of social equality. This is precisely why William J. Simmons stated in *Men of Mark*: "I have faith in my people. I wish to exalt them; I want their lives snatched from obscurity to become household

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<sup>245</sup> Carroll, 81.

matter for conversation.”<sup>246</sup> Simmons’ faith was well-founded. The practice of binding together critical textual discourse with portraits that effectively destabilized, questioned, and blurred categories of American identity in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries was in fact necessary and successful. Without such a process, I would probably not be writing this conclusion in a library filled by portraits that, for the most part, depict white middle-class men.

Moreover, such a practice is probably still necessary today considering the growth of increasingly hegemonic and imperialistic institutions within a globalizing social environment in which individuals are competing for social power while others live and die in communities beset by poverty, violence, and injustice. To use text and portrait critically is to question contemporary conflations and polarities of identity, “gay” and “feminine,” “blackness” and “criminality,” or “womanhood” and “powerlessness” for instance. These conflations seem to be connected so effortlessly in many branches of contemporary media: the Ferguson incident as well as the inability of victims of rape such as Columbia University student Emma Sulkowicz to obtain justice are just two windows into the pervasiveness of such relationships. The recording of truth and the demands of equality in the face of social differentiation are all the more necessary considering an onslaught of historical elision as evinced by the destruction of historical black churches in Atlanta, Georgia. These churches were the places which held the meetings foundational to the establishment the Atlanta University system. Yet, developers are demolishing them to make way for football stadiums in which black

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<sup>246</sup> Simmons, 8.

bodies will be irreversibly damaged in violent games, games by which black youth will be irreversibly brainwashed.

The elision is probably best exemplified by the pervasive eurocentrism that still exists within art history, a discipline that ignores large portions of marginalized histories which reveal intergenerational transfers of privilege. The practice of combining critical text with portraits should be considered as operative within cultural continuums comprised of models, networks, and narratives constructed by groups of people who lived in the past but who sought to form cultural continuity and effect structural change for individuals in the future. That black book publishers such as Arno Press of New York and the Afro-American Press of Chicago reprinted three of the volumes in the late 1960s and in the early 1970s directly after the Civil Rights Movement and during the Black Power Movement indicates the material restoration of object and the metaphysical reprising of ideology necessary in reproducing such continuity. Portraits and biographies of Africans such as those of the last Queen of Madagascar Ranavarona III and the seventeenth-century Queen Anna Zinga appear in *Noted Negro Women*. In *Men of Mark*, James E.J. Capitein, “a Negro Born in Africa – taken to Europe – Educated in Holland” and Olaudah Equiano, the well-known author of *the Interesting Narrative of a Life of Olaudah Equiano*, appear along with blacks who were naturalized American citizens. While for whatever reason there were no male heads of state from Africa in these books, these entries indicate a syncretic trans-Atlantic identity and imagined community formed to cut through the social frame of Jim Crow United States potentially exposing the outgrowth of European supremacy on a global scale and referring, if obliquely, to the development of European colonization, a form of social



dominance as, if not more, pernicious than black slavery. Though I did not have the space to investigate it thoroughly, inclusion of figures from African social spheres and geographies potentially uncover intersections of self-representational identity and hybridity that helped form a global “aesthetic of blackness,” as Murray and Murray call it.<sup>247</sup> It is clear that variants of copying functioned and will continue to function as social tools within a seemingly interminable social movement often called civil rights revolution and, on a broader, more global scale, the struggle for black equality. What these books and their discourse tell us is that it is not enough to contribute to a dominant system, narrative, or discourse; we must instead be critical in our contributions and we must be critical of our own production within the networks that form the dominant systems from which we consume.

I could make this conclusion more affirmative by outlining some monolithic successful struggle of blacks to gain rights and to fix the social exigencies caused solely by white supremacy, but that would be to err. By the late 1950s, James Baldwin noted that race relations in Charlotte, North Carolina, were “manipulated by the [white] mayor and a fairly strong Negro middle class.”<sup>248</sup> When Baldwin, whose father had migrated to the North during the Great Migration, went to Charlotte, North Carolina, and to Atlanta, Georgia, he noted that social order had crystallized into what felt like a “hermetic” social

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<sup>247</sup>The concept of an aesthetic of blackness is explored in Soraya and Derek Conrad Murray. “On Art and Contamination: Performing Authenticity in Global Art Practices” *Nka : Journal of Contemporary African Art* 22/23 (2008): 88.

<sup>248</sup> James Baldwin, “A Letter from the South,” in *Nobody Knows My Name*, James Baldwin (New York: Dell Publishing Company, 1961), 89.

environment. The term hermetic connotes a social environment without change and within a perpetual cycle. Clearly, the black middle class often functioned in a relationship of hegemony. In a Gramscian sense, they conformed to some social standards, deviated from others, while oppressing their “subordinates” in order to maintain their place in society. The black middle-class absorbed and relayed many structures from discourses that were widely-accepted in nineteenth-century America and used these discourses to support dominant racial hierarchies. Until the Second Reconstruction, the portrait photograph was means of surveillance, dominance, and suppression at black colleges. Howard University, where a light-skinned Josephine Turpin Washington who was related to Thomas Jefferson studied, required that candidates submit their portrait with their applications. The faculty used this combination of text and image to insure that the skin pigmentation of new students was nearer to the white side of the color scale than to the black side.

I do not mean to be entirely glib, however. One of the incredible things about these dictionaries is the heterogeneity of phenotype. The light and the dark pigments show, once again, the arbitrariness and faultiness of racial categories constructed to reinforce the growth of capitalism and social differentiation. Moreover, upon visiting the South as a quadruple outsider (born into poverty, black, gay, and from the North), Baldwin witnessed “Negro parents who [spent] their days trembling for their children and the rest of their time praying that their children have not been too badly damaged inside...because they [wanted] the child to receive the education which will allow him [or her] to defeat, possibly escape, and not impossibly help one day abolish the stifling

environment in which they see, daily, so many children perish.”<sup>249</sup> “Escape,” “praying,” and “abolish” take the charge in this narrative of struggle from the South. They were surely not new words. They came from the Social Gospel and from Afro-Protestantism (Baldwin was a preacher in a storefront church in Harlem as a youth). These words, set against “stifling” cycles of social inequity, would also be bound inextricably to portraits within another recently developed, industrial medium of the twentieth-century.

From 1966 to 1967, the great womanist writer Alice Walker wrote “The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?” published in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens*. In the essay, Walker stated “six years ago, after half-heartedly watching my mother’s soap operas and wondering whether there wasn’t something more to be asked of life, the Civil Rights Movement came into my life.”<sup>250</sup> Before that movement came to her life, however, a portrait sparked something in Walker. “Like a good omen for the future,” wrote Walker, “the face of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was the first black face I saw on our new television screen. And, as in a fairy tale, my soul was stirred by the meaning for me of his mission.”<sup>251</sup> The parallels are remarkable. Walker was born and raised a Baptist in the Christian South just as King and the editors of *Men of Mark*, *Afro-American Press*, *Women of Distinction*, and *Noted Negro Women* were. She studied at Spelman College, a historically black college in Atlanta, before going to Barnard College in New York. King studied at Morehouse University a historically black college begun by

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<sup>249</sup> Baldwin, 90 – 91.

<sup>250</sup> Alice Walker, “The Civil Rights Movement: What Good Was It?,” in *In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens* (San Diego: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1983), 124.

<sup>251</sup> Walker, 124.

missionary activities of the Social Gospel. As I have mentioned, the editors studied at southern black universities as well. The young adult Martin Luther King, Jr., attained a doctorate at Boston University and wrote the dissertation "A Comparison of the Conceptions of God in the Thinking of Paul Tillich and Henry Nelson Wieman" for which he used some variations of copying that Boston University considered spurious in the 1990s. Nonetheless, he was highly literate and had considerable social mobility. He was a founder and leader of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, a group within a movement that revolved around a narrative structure of suffering, progress, resistance, struggle, remembrance, reciprocity, and equality. In the 1960s, or more specifically in Walker's household in the 1960s, the television was both novel and industrial like the industrial book of the 1840s; rendered in never-before-seen naturalism, its portraits did things that portraits in older media could not do. They moved, walked, spoke and showed expression. An excerpt from Walker's essay provides an important insight which may be productive in the conclusion of this thesis:

"Because of the Movement, because of an awakened faith in the newness and imagination of the human spirit, because of 'black and white together' – for the first time in our history in some human relationship on and off TV – because of the beatings, the arrests, the hell of battle during the years, I have fought harder for my life and for a chance to be myself, to be more than a shadow or a number, than I had ever done before in my life. Before, there had seemed to be no real reason for struggling beyond the effort for daily bread alone."<sup>252</sup>

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<sup>252</sup> Walker, 125.

One is reminded of Benedict Anderson's imagined community here and of Neil Harris' visual reorientation. A new medium (or rather mediums) that led to the formation of a sensation of simultaneity with one's own time, of contemporaneity, of newness which renders identity definite and which makes consciousness resolute as opposed to doubled, which eases the tension of individuation making a subject find a greater purpose in social movement identity. Now more resolute and well-formed, individual identity confronts social inequity and engages movement identity in the American nation. We could easily plug in the set of data compiled for this thesis into the model provided by Walker's foundational essay (it is actually a foundation for this thesis):

Because of Reconstruction, because of an awakened faith in the newness and imagination of the human spirit, because of 'black and white together' – for the first time in our history in some human relationship on and off industrially printed nineteenth-century media – because of the beatings, the arrests, the hell of battle during the years, I have fought harder for my life and for a chance to be myself, to be more than a shadow or a number, than I had ever done before in my life. We can be more precise, of course: The influence that *Darktown Comics* or the Dunning School might have had on me became impossible. The life and image of Ida B. Wells in *Women of Distinction*, seeming bigger and more miraculous than the woman herself, because of all she had done and suffered, offered a portrait and biography of strength and sincerity I felt I could trust.

In the above statement I replaced many of the nouns specific to twentieth-century America with nouns of the nineteenth century. The pronoun "I" representing Walker in the 1960s is substituted for an unknown, nineteenth-century African American reader of

Scruggs' volume. It could even possibly be the Arkansan editor, civil rights activist, and journalist Daisy Bates (1914 – 1999) who was a leader in the Little Rock Integration Crisis of 1957. Perhaps the pronoun "I" really stands for me as in "I, the author of this thesis, who looked at the portraits of black men and women in African-American illustrated biographical dictionaries made during Jim Crow." Either way, this substitution can occur with any similar inputs at any time or in any geography as long as what occurs for the subject who absorbs the image and the text is that feeling of contemporaneity, criticality, *and* lineage, the realization that their identity within a group with a definite history is greater than their identity as a discrete, disparate, and singular individual. The substitutions will form a similar output for as long as the identity category "black," in Stuart Hall's sense of the word, operates in a shadowy relationship of coercive oppression, mythic desire, and conventional fantasy with the processes of modernization or for as long as any similar label of identity operates similarly.<sup>253</sup> This is all to say that with critical text, a portrait tells us that we must skirt the boundaries of resistance and compliance, of expectation and reality, and that we must seek to do some good within whichever "zone" we may predominantly reside and with whichever identity category to which we subscribe or within which we are placed. This is what I have done in writing all of this, an act which I consider one of compliance, resistance, agency, and service. More specifically and importantly, however, the above model and the industrially reproduced portraiture and text in illustrated biographical dictionaries

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<sup>253</sup> Stuart Hall, "What is this 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?," *Social Justice*, 20, no. 1 – 2, Rethinking Race (Spring – Summer 1993): 113. See also Peter Stallybrass and Allon White, *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1986).

made from 1887 to 1893 tell us that if resistance is futile so is any attempt to suppress it.

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## Vita

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