HULL, ELIZABETH ARNOLD, M.A. Family Pictures "Out of Place": Race, Resistance, and Affirmation in the Pope Family Photograph Collection, 1890-1920. (2006) Directed by Dr. Lisa Levenstein. 112 pp.

This thesis explores the significance of family photography for African Americans in the Jim Crow South through an examination of the photograph collection kept by the Popes, a middle-class African American family of Raleigh, NC. Drawing from multiple disciplines including social history, material culture, and visual culture, the study argues that portraiture represents a crucial yet under-examined arena for the construction of black identity and the expression of political agency under segregation.

Findings include that the production, display, and distribution of photographs by families like the Popes represented political acts of opposition to images of blacks created by the dominant culture, as well as examples of African Americans taking control over their own representation in response to white supremacist stereotypes. Meanwhile, these photographs also fulfilled important personal functions, allowing blacks to shape their own legacy and to define and affirm their own senses of beauty, self-worth, and belonging.

FAMILY PICTURES "OUT OF PLACE": RACE, RESISTANCE,

AND AFFIRMATION IN THE POPE FAMILY

PHOTOGRAPH COLLECTION, 1890-1920

by

Elizabeth Arnold Hull

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of The Graduate School at
The University of North Carolina at Greensboro
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Master of Arts

Greensboro
2006

Approved by

_____
Committee Chair

APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of The Graduate School at The University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

Committee Chair _____

Committee Members _____

_____

_____
Date of Acceptance by Committee

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

PREFACE

On March 18 and 19, 2005, archivists, scholars, historians, and students of the American South gathered at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill for a symposium commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of the founding of the Southern Historical Collection (SHC), considered one of the country's preeminent and most comprehensive repositories of historical materials, and a must-visit archive for anyone seeking to research or reconstruct the Southern past. Most of the panel presentations and discussions were focused on race relations, what many would consider the defining issue, or "problem," as it has often been called, in the history of the region.

Historians like Tera Hunter decried the lack of direct and accessible sources documenting the black experience, but argued that the African American perspective is not, as some have described it, "irretrievable." Steven Hahn admonished the typical treatment of African Americans as objects, rather than agents, of history, and encouraged the next generation of historians to examine the archives generated by blacks themselves. Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, author of a prominent study of segregation in North Carolina, addressed the problem most directly with this statement: "The Jim Crow South produced Jim Crow archives." Beyond paying homage to the SHC, Gilmore challenged its curators to remedy the "paucity of African American voices from between the Civil War and Civil Rights."

All at the "Southern Sources" symposium seemed to agree that what was needed was a movement of cooperation between "academic" and "public" historians, blacks and

whites, established scholars and up-and-coming ones, to reclaim existing sources, make

them accessible to all kinds of people, and devise innovative methods for reading them. I

aim to contribute to such a movement with this thesis project, using a collection of

materials soon to be housed at the SHC—the Pope Family photographs. By examining

these images, an archive of portraits actively composed and constructed by a middle-class

Southern black family during the Jim Crow period, I hope to be able to retrieve,

understand, and interpret—as much as possible—*their* version of an historical record. In

so doing, this project will encourage a more balanced and inclusive approach not only to

how we study the past, but to the ways we preserve and remember it.

Through their portraits, middle-class African Americans, denied so much during

their lifetimes, staked a claim on the future. If we are to gain some understanding of how

middle-class black families constructed identity, exercised political agency, and fought to

improve the conditions of their lives and those of their descendents, we must seek new

ways of looking at the archives they left behind.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF FIGURES

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

By nature, family photographs are personal belongings. They are collected in albums and shoeboxes, framed and hung on walls at home, and mailed to friends and relatives, all of which takes place within a sphere of safety and familiarity. While their meanings have shifted over time, modern observers recognize the ability of family portraits to serve on a personal level as reference points for identity formation, frameworks for community-building, and as signifiers of past achievements and future dreams. However, family photograph collections also form part of broader stories, especially in their role as documentary records, preserved as enduring legacies.

Using approximately 350 portraits from the photograph collection kept by the Popes, an educated, prominent, and successful African-American family of Raleigh, North Carolina, this study will show how the significance of family photography was dramatically amplified and complicated for Southern blacks living as victims of the Jim Crow system, under which their claims to identity, community, and other basic rights were constantly challenged by white supremacist society. Within these historical circumstances, I will argue, one must view family photograph collections simultaneously and interconnectedly as objects—belongings, part of the domestic realm—and as components of larger social and political discourses about race, class, and gender

Because of the ubiquitous threats African Americans faced in the Jim Crow South, the creation, display, and distribution of photographs by families like the Popes represented acts of opposition to images of blacks created by the dominant culture, as well as efforts to shape a new vision of blackness, as they understood it. As bell hooks writes:

> The walls and walls of images in southern black homes were sites of resistance. They constituted private, black-owned and –operated, gallery space where images could be displayed…The camera was the central instrument by which blacks could disprove representations of us created by white folks. The degrading images of blackness that emerged from racist white imaginations and circulated widely in the dominant culture…could be countered by 'true-to-life' images.[1]

The Pope family photograph collection represents an "antiracist counterarchive," to use visual scholar Shawn Michelle Smith's term—a powerful example of early twentieth-century African Americans struggling to take control over their own image and legacy in response to white supremacist stereotypes. As Smith writes, "If one cannot or does not produce an archive, others will dictate the terms by which one will be represented and remembered; one will exist, for the future, in someone else's archive."[2] Families like the Popes used formal portraiture to visualize themselves in their own terms, employing elements like dress, facial expression, setting, and props to highlight personal qualities they found desirable—to construct the version of themselves they wanted remembered.

---

[1] bell hooks, "In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life," in *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography*, Deborah Willis, ed. (New York: New Press, 1994), 47-48.

[2] Shawn Michelle Smith, *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004), 9.

While blacks of all classes participated in this form of resistance at the turn of the twentieth century, the arena of visual representation took on unique relevance for the emerging black middle class, or "better class," as they referred to themselves. The legacy of Reconstruction dominated the Southern white supremacist imagination at this time, especially in North Carolina, where Democratic leaders were determined that blacks should never again occupy positions of influence as they had in the years following emancipation. The proper role of blacks in society in their minds was as menial laborers, at the bottom of the social hierarchy. The Popes and many others like them, meanwhile, had stepped so far out of the "place" assigned to them that they needed documentary proof that "out of place" was where they belonged. Their photograph collections, as counterarchives, helped provide that proof.

Through photographs, the better class portrayed themselves as emblematic of all of the best qualities of which the race was capable, offering visual support to their claims for political equality, while suggesting the kind of deportment they believed would lead to progress for the race as a whole. In this way, family portraits comprised a vital, yet overlooked, part of the larger campaign of racial improvement or "uplift" waged by elite African Americans like the Popes at the turn of the century.

How did portraits housed within the Pope household "send messages" of resistance to the white power structure, or of racial uplift to the black lower classes, if neither group had the opportunity to see the images? Unlike popular imagery, portraits were not typically available to the "public" at large. Only those in a position to be welcomed inside the black home, photograph gallery, or network of correspondence were

exposed to them. Yet even though the portraits were not publicly visible, they were a component of the larger effort on the part of blacks to re-invent and re-visualize not only themselves as individuals, but their race as a whole. As James Scott eloquently discusses in his work on subordinate groups, most forms of resistance do not occur directly in the face of those in power, but rather "behind the scenes."[3] Similarly, although lower and working class blacks would not have been invited into the better-class black home to view the portraits, the images nonetheless form part of a visual "prescriptive" iconography of racial uplift created to represent the possibility of ascent to bourgeois status.[4] The Pope portraits represent better-class attempts to externalize their progress, to give it a material form, and to construct a new, positive African American image, symbolic of their hopes for the future of their race.

Portrait ownership also had constructive effects on an individual level. The production, display, and exchange of portraits provided inward affirmation and reinforcement, allowing blacks to define and uphold their own senses of beauty, identity, self-worth, and belonging. Southern blacks both needed and desired photographs to enforce their claims to elevated status and to remind them of their worth in inevitable times of self-doubt. Beyond the Popes' need to bolster themselves against racist attacks, their photographs served more hopeful objectives—to celebrate their accomplishments and material attainments, narrate their life stories, and reinforce their own sense of themselves as members of wider local, familial, ethnic, and even national communities.

---

[3] James Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts*, (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 1-16.

[4] Ellen Daugherty, *Lifting the Veil of Ignorance: The Visual Culture of African American Racial Uplift* (Ph.D. diss., University of Virginia, 2004).

Under the particular and often volatile circumstances of segregation, disfranchisement, and the threat of violence against any black person who dared to buck the racial code, sources of such affirmation, safety, and comfort were crucial.

In the case of the "better class," these images helped shore them up to perform what they saw as their central duties: combating racism and improving conditions for themselves and for their race as a whole. The creation and display of portraits in better-class homes could help to inculcate and reinforce at the individual level values of propriety, thrift, success, dignity, and respectability—values which could then be carried with them in their transactions with wider society.

HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Manassa Thomas Pope was born in Northampton County, North Carolina, in 1858 to parents both of free status. He moved to Raleigh in 1874 to attend Shaw University's Leonard Medical School, was a member of its first graduating class in 1886, and went on to become the first black man in North Carolina to be granted a medical license.[5] He married his first wife, Lydia Walden, and moved to Hendersen, NC, where Dr. Pope accepted a political appointment as assistant postmaster. In 1892 the Popes moved on to Charlotte, where Dr. Pope was immediately recognized as a prominent addition to the city's black business community. There he practiced medicine and co-established the

---

[5] The history of the Pope family has been pieced together by Kenneth Zogry, director of the Pope House Museum Foundation, and will be fully recounted in his forthcoming dissertation for the University of North Carolina-Chapel Hill.

Queen City Drug Company, the city's first black-owned and –operated store.[6] He also

helped to found the People's Benevolent and Relief Association, an insurance company

whose brochure publicized claims for "A Great Negro Society – Just What We Need."[7]

The 1890s were years both of great promise and great tragedy for African

Americans in North Carolina. Historian Glenda Gilmore describes how Redeemer

politics had begun to unravel, upstaged by the so-called "fusion" of the Republican Party

with the Populists.[8] This alliance was most successful in the elections of 1896, when

numerous Democratic candidates for state house and senate were defeated by fusion

candidates, several of whom were African American. When the Spanish-American War

broke out, Dr. Pope joined his close friend, newly elected State Representative James H.

Young, in forming an all-black volunteer regiment, in which Pope served as first

lieutenant and first assistant surgeon. The Third Regiment never saw battle, but aroused a

good deal of controversy about the worthiness of black men to serve in the American

military; James Young, Dr. Pope, and other enlistees saw their service as an opportunity

to demonstrate their patriotism, capability, and masculinity.

Such optimism was dealt a serious blow by the 1898 Wilmington race riot, and

nearly crushed by the surrounding White Supremacy campaign waged by Democrats in

---

[6] Janette Greenwood, *Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White 'Better Classes' in Charlotte, 1850-1910*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994), 136.

[7] Pope Family Papers #5085, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

[8] Glenda Elizabeth Gilmore, *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996), 77.

response to Fusion successes. Democratic leaders Furnifold Simmons, Josephus Daniels, and Charles Aycock orchestrated a campaign of propaganda with the protection of white women as the central issue, linking black progress with an invented increase in attacks on white women. The White Supremacy campaign visually referenced the black man as "incubus," invading the safety of white homes to despoil the purity of their women, and in the case of the members of the Third NC Regiment, as walking phallic symbols.[9] Indeed, the Wilmington riot, in which numerous blacks of all classes were violently murdered, was begun over a discussion of interracial sex. As Gilmore writes, "…What happened in Wilmington was about more than party politics or economic jealousy or even racism. It was about how political rhetoric can license people to do evil in the name of good."[10] Such rhetoric was successful in engineering the passage of North Carolina's Disfranchisement Amendment of 1900, which all but ended official black political participation in the state.

Not all blacks were completely shut down by the White Supremacy campaign. After mustering out of military service in 1899, Dr. Pope returned to Raleigh with his first wife and established a drug store and medical practice, selecting the site for their house on the 500 block of South Wilmington Street in what was then a relatively prestigious neighborhood of black professionals. Lydia Walden Pope died of tuberculosis in 1906, and within a short period Dr. Pope met and married Delia Haywood Phillips, a schoolteacher and member of a prominent Raleigh family that included the well-known

---

[9] Ibid., 81.

[10] Ibid., 92.

educator Anna Julia Haywood Cooper. Delia gave birth to two daughters, Evelyn in 1908 and Ruth in 1910.

As a result of his father's and grandfather's status as freedmen, Dr. Pope was one of only a handful of black men eligible to vote after the passage of the Disfranchisement Amendment. He participated in the Twentieth Century Voters' Club, one of several organizations that sprung up in response to black disfranchisement, and in 1919, took the remarkable step of running for mayor of Raleigh on an all-black slate of candidates. Dr. Pope and his fellow candidates realized that victory was unattainable but ran nonetheless, in order to send a message to other members of their race about the importance of political participation. Racial tensions ran very high during the "Red Summer" of 1919, as African American soldiers returned from service in World War I only to face discrimination and hostility; race riots raged in northern cities; and lynchings reached record numbers. The Raleigh campaign was the club's most visible act of protest against white supremacy, one that carried the risk of violent reprisal.

The women of the Pope family, Dr. Pope's wife Delia and their daughters Evelyn and Ruth, were extremely capable, progressive-minded, well-educated, and active in the community. The Pope family was counted among Raleigh's elite black society, and celebrated many achievements such as Delia's work as a representative for Madam C.J. Walker cosmetics, and Ruth and Evelyn's eventual Master's degrees from Columbia University. Evelyn became a reputable librarian at the North Carolina Central University Law School, and Ruth a popular teacher of home economics in the Chapel Hill public

schools; neither sister married or had children. Dr. Pope died in 1934, followed by Delia in 1955.[11]

To understand the Pope family photograph collection as a "counterarchive," it is essential to situate it within the broader historical framework of Jim Crow segregation, and to gain some idea of the "mainstream" archives against which the collection operates. Historian Leon Litwack describes segregation as a system which dehumanized and demoralized blacks constantly and shows how no black person, regardless of status, was exempt from its degradation: "For all blacks, whatever their age, education, or social class, Jim Crow was a daily affront, a reminder of the distinctive place 'white folks' had marked out for them—a confirmation of their inferiority and baseness in the eyes of the dominant population."[12] One of the primary ways in which white society tried to convey and enforce the "rules" of Jim Crow was through visual imagery, in Social Darwinist literature, advertising, political cartoons, films like 1914's "The Birth of a Nation," and other forms of popular culture. Racist stereotypes, which in Marilyn Kern-Foxworth's words "hung around the necks of blacks as chains had once in slavery," presented them as ignorant, mindless, criminal, savage, or childlike—in essence, incapable of the demands of citizenship and inassimilable into the mainstream.[13]

---

[11] Evelyn and Ruth maintained the family residence in Raleigh, moved back in after retirement in the 1970s, and lived there until their respective deaths in 1995 and 2002.

[12] Leon Litwack, *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 238.

[13] Marilyn Kern-Foxworth, *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994), xviii.

Although all African Americans, regardless of class, experienced the consequences of Jim Crow, visual representation took on a distinctive significance among members the emerging black "better class," as they referred to themselves, of which the Popes were members.[14] Seen as having most flagrantly stepped "out of place," and thus posing the greatest threat to white dominance, they became a particular target for degrading representations which implied they could never integrate into middle-class society.[15] In fact, in the cities of the South, more and more African Americans were finding the means to move outside their assigned "place," acquiring education, credentials, jobs, property, and legitimate claims to true American "middle class" status. As they were singled out for racist caricature, they may have felt a unique responsibility to respond.

Portraiture was a means by which African Americans could attempt to insert themselves into the class structure, carving out a space on par with the white middle class, while also distinguishing themselves from the black lower classes. As Shirley Wajda has written, a portrait during this time "serve[d] not only as a reminder of what is and what was, but as a status marker, symbolizing acceptance of bourgeois values."[16] The

---

[14] See Greenwood, 5-6 for discussion of why this term is more appropriate than "middle-class" or "elite."

[15] Grace Elizabeth Hale, *Making Whiteness: The Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940* (New York: Vintage Books, 1998), 157. Grace Elizabeth Hale has studied portrayals of blacks in trade card advertising during this period, which often pictured blacks trying foolishly and unsuccessfully to participate in activities, such as dressing in respectable clothing, considered the province of middle-class whites.

[16] Shirley Teresa Wajda, "The Artistic Portrait Photograph," in *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930,* Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling, eds. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 166.

display of portraits within the black "better class" home fit with the white middle-class emphasis on domesticity, or the idea of home as the place where upstanding values were imparted and refined.[17] The ability of better-class blacks to have portraits made and to display them in the home implied success and supported claims to high social standing.

The images created by African Americans during this period are illustrative of the beginnings of the so-called "New Negro" ideology, and part of early efforts to envision what a New Negro at the turn of the century might look like. In 1900, when Booker T. Washington and other authors published *A New Negro for a New Century*, they included formal portraits of the prominent race representatives they discussed in the book.[18] J. E. MacBrady notes in his introduction, "The photographs contained in this book make a most pleasing gallery of intelligent and progressive men, and strong, intellectual and charming women."[19] The emerging black better class seized onto photography as a means of expressing their newfound confidence, social mobility, and worthiness for full and equal rights. "The New Negro movement believed that all men and women were created equal," writes Deborah Willis, "and was prepared to offer visualization to prove it." [20]

---

[17] Ibid., 168.

[18] Booker T. Washington, N. B. Wood, and Fannie Barrier Williams, *A New Negro for a New Century* (New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969). Includes a portrait of James H. Young from the Spanish-American War also found in the Pope collection. Various sources in the Pope family papers document Dr. Pope's interest in Washington's work; his 1901 *Up From Slavery* is among the books in Dr. Pope's library.

[19] Ibid., 5.

[20] Deborah Willis, "The Sociologist's Eye: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Paris Exhibition." In *A Small Nation of People: W.E.B. Du Bois and African American Portraits of Progress*, Library of Congress, ed. (New York: HarperCollins, 2003) 52.

This fits with the development of what is known as "Uplift" ideology among prominent blacks. As the black better class grew in numbers and prominence, many of them began to adopt and espouse the idea that the social and economic barriers faced by blacks could be overcome through a combination of self-help, religion, prudence, dignified behavior, racial unity, and the accumulation of wealth. A key element of Uplift was the notion that the most gifted, exceptional, best-educated, and successful blacks would lead the way, setting an example for less fortunate members of their race. Baptist leader and orator Nannie H. Burroughs summarizes their motivations eloquently:

> A race transforms itself through its own leaders. It rises on its own wings, or is held down by its own weight. True leaders never set themselves apart. They are with the masses in their struggle. They simply got to the front first. Their only business at the front is to inspire the masses by hard work and noble example and to challenge them to 'come on!' Dante said, 'Show the people the light and they will find the way![21]

At the root of Uplift ideology was the idea that the individual, by behaving and portraying her/himself in a certain way, could positively influence conditions for race as a whole; moreover, anyone in an elevated social position had the responsibility to do so.[22]

Formal portraits, created in the very controlled environment of the home or studio, could provide evidence of the sense of dignity and status better-class blacks believed was necessary to ensure the advancement and "uplift" of their race. As Barbara McCandless discusses, there were precedents for the social use of portraits in this manner

---

[21] Nannie H. Burroughs, "Twelve Things the Negro Must Do For Himself," in *Nannie Helen Burroughs* by Opal V. Easter (New York and London: Garland Inc., 1995). 135-36.

[22] Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993), 196.

based on the nineteenth-century belief that portraits of the social elite could "provide moral edification for all its citizens who needed to learn how to present themselves as good Americans in a quest for upward mobility."[23] Given the tendency of the black better class to use photographs to assert their equality with the white upper classes, there is reason to suspect that blacks would also have ascribed portraits with such instructive capabilities.

It is important to note, however, that no consensus existed among elite blacks on the best way to conduct the improvement or "moral instruction" of the lower classes of their race. Historian Kevin Gaines is quick to point out that there were many different strains of uplift ideology within the elite community, often resulting in bitter debates.[24] At the same time, the upper classes did not own the market on values of respectability and racial improvement; many lower- and working-class blacks wholeheartedly devoted themselves to these same ends. Close examination of the practice of uplift reveals divisions within the black community and the ultimate fluidity of African American politics and resistance during the Jim Crow period.

While the motivations behind uplift were positive, as an ideological construction it was loaded with judgment, ambiguity, and contradiction. Numerous historians including Gaines have begun exploring the ways in which elite blacks rejected the principles of white supremacy and segregation while seemingly deferring to them in

---

[23] Barbara McCandless, "The Portrait Studio and the Celebrity," in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, Martha A. Sandweiss, ed. (Fort Worth, Texas: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1991), 49.

[24] Kevin Gaines, *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996), xix.

practice by insisting upon "dignified" public behavior. Many "better class" blacks were deeply embarrassed by the public deportment and displays of their lower-class counterparts and sought to distance themselves as far as possible from this culture. As Tera Hunter writes, "the black elite sought to impose its own values and standards on the masses, to obliterate plebeian cultural expressions that, in its view, prolonged the degradation of the race."[25] Some race leaders became increasingly disparaging, going so far as to implicitly fault lower-class blacks for their status.[26]

The Pope family portraits embody the dual nature of what Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham refers to as the "politics of respectability": the attempts of the black upper classes to counter racist images through individual conduct while implicitly denouncing the lower classes for behavior which did not fit the dominant society's definition of propriety.[27] Because racism was so thoroughly ingrained in southern society, Higginbotham argues, elite blacks' claims to equality were highly subversive by nature; their emphasis on "good manners," however, was ultimately accomodationist, a "concession to hegemonic values."[28] The Pope portraits vividly symbolize this tension— by presenting images of dignified and successful African American individuals, they offer visual evidence of the abilities of the race, but they also imply something "wrong" with blacks who failed to achieve such a level of demeanor.

---

[25] Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War* (Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997), 186.

[26] Gaines, 4-8.

[27] Higginbotham, 187-211.

[28] Ibid., 193.

Ultimately, however, the Pope portraits' signify most saliently the altruistic

motivations behind racial uplift—in Gaines' words, the "struggle for a positive black

identity."[29] The photographs taken and kept by black families were more than refutations

of negative stereotypes or examples for (or condemnations of) the less fortunate; they

were an exercise in active identity formation and the shaping of legacy, evidence of black

agency during the Jim Crow period, proactive as well as reactive. African Americans

used photography not only to disprove stereotypes and to project an image of dignity and

good "character" in support of claims for equality, but to construct new identities for

themselves as powerful women, accomplished gentlemen, and well-behaved children

with promising prospects, and to ensure that history would reflect these identifications.

This effort is similar to what Nell Painter writes in reference to Sojourner Truth's self-

representation: "She used photography to embody and empower herself, to present the

images of herself that *she* wanted remembered."[30]

The second chapter of this study will concern itself primarily with photographs as

objects of value to those who possessed them, focusing on how the physical

characteristics and manipulation of photographs help to interpret meaning, as well as

offer evidence of political agency. Chapters Three and Four take a more specific

analytical approach, considering the Pope family photographs as objects of power and

memory, respectively. Chapter Three deals with how ideas of masculinity are reflected in

the photos within the specific historical context of the Spanish-American War and North

---

[29] Gaines, 3.

[30] Nell Irvin Painter, "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known" *Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Sept. 1994), 462.

Carolina's White Supremacy movement. The analysis considers how the images may have operated both as a form of resistance to popular imagery of black men, and privately, as objects representing Dr. Pope's personal power. Chapter Four will investigate the photos as representative not just of defiance to the dominant narrative, but of memory and legacy, especially in relation to the women of the Pope family—Dr. Pope's second wife Delia, and their daughters Evelyn and Ruth.

The Popes refused to be remembered in "someone else's archive." Kenneth Zogry, the Pope House Museum Foundation's director, finds it no coincidence that the institutions that would become North Carolina's Museum of History and its Division of Archives and History were founded by Democratic leaders in 1902 and 1903, respectively, just as the White Supremacy campaign had reached its goal of silencing African American voices in the public political sphere.[31] White Democrats and African Americans alike seized the opportunity to create a "historical record" that would tell their side of the story—only whites, however, had the benefit of political power, public support, and funding. Blacks had to make do with their own methods.

HISTORIOGRAPHY AND METHODOLOGY

In recent decades a major task of social historians, especially scholars of women and racial and ethnic minorities, has been to challenge traditional definitions of "politics" —to test the boundaries of what should be considered "political" action, and to explore ways in which informal, everyday acts of resistance interact with and impact formal political systems. Such investigations have served to break down perceived walls

---

[31] Zogry, forthcoming.

separating the "public" sphere of society from the "private," revealing complex and compelling ways in which these spheres overlap with and bleed into one another. They have also successfully established segments of the population traditionally overlooked by historians as vital and influential historical actors.

In the field of African American history, the result of these more inclusive historiographical trends is a continuing and thorough reconfiguration of the development and expression of black politics.[32] The black experience under Jim Crow, particularly that of the "better class," has been a recent focus of many historians. Using a variety of archival sources, scholars have established the historical and ideological contexts of white supremacy, and insightfully explored the motivations and survival strategies of black Southerners under segregation. Several of these authors have convincingly interpreted their sources as evidence of strong and sophisticated political consciousness among the women and men of the black better class. [33]

None of these works, however, has adequately considered the importance of photographs not only as documentary supplements and alternatives to written records, but

---

[32] The most influential works in this area include Steven Hahn's *A Nation Under Our Feet: Black Political Struggles in the Rural South, From Slavery to the Great Migration* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003) and Robin D. G. Kelley's *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class* (New York: The Free Press, 1994).

[33] See for examples Greenwood's *Bittersweet Legacy*; Litwack's *Trouble in Mind*; Gaines' *Uplifting the Race*; Hale's *Making Whiteness;* and Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow*, all previously cited; also Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993); Stephanie Shaw, *What a Woman Ought to Be and To Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era* (Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996); and Martin Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004).

also as windows into black life and evidence of active identity construction and political agency under Jim Crow. Historic images offer an opportunity, underexploited by scholars thus far, to postulate how black photographic subjects saw themselves, and how they desired to be seen. Although some recent scholarly work has been done in the field of black visual representation, most notably by scholars Deborah Willis and Shawn Michelle Smith, historical research and analysis of the photographs produced by African Americans under segregation is still in its early stages. Few studies have examined the ways in which African Americans used photography to represent identity, or how they interacted with their photographs as personal possessions.[34]

This study of the Pope family portraits contributes to and suggests new directions in the politics of self-representation, exhibiting in particular the usefulness of family photographs for understanding African American political expression. The Popes' photographs were political statements in the traditional sense, in that they were part of an effort waged by better-class blacks to demonstrate their worthiness for citizenship rights, including the franchise. The portraits represented a form of subversive resistance to inaccurate, insulting, racist, and unjust representations of blacks promoted by the dominant white-supremacist culture. I will argue that even the personal uses of portraits, as signifiers of status, identity, and community, should be considered part of the realm of politics in that they offered affirmation and support in the larger struggle to improve conditions for the race. Therefore, African American family photography should also be

---

[34] See Smith's *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* and *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture*, and Deborah Willis' *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present.*

viewed under a more fluid, less formal definition of politics, one which includes any

individual action taken to improve one's own existence, using whatever available

resources. Robin D. G. Kelley summarizes this definition powerfully when he writes:

> Politics is not separate from lived experience or the imaginary world of what is
> possible; to the contrary, politics is about these things. Politics comprise the many
> battles to roll back constraints and exercise some power over, or create some
> space within, the institutions and social relationships that dominate our lives.[35]

The attempts to both carve out one's niche in the world and to gain control over one's

destiny are exactly the ends towards which families like the Popes were working when

they planned, posed for, took, kept, displayed, and distributed photographs of themselves.

Historians like Kevin Gaines, Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, and Glenda

Elizabeth Gilmore have insightfully explored the public expressions of uplift ideology by

the black better class. Studying the personal photograph collection of an elite black

family reveals the extent to which uplift infiltrated virtually every aspect of the existence

of families like the Popes—how the cause of racial improvement was for them not just a

talking point, but a way of life. Further, this study is different from existing ones in that it

examines the ways the Popes used their photographs as possessions to "uplift" not just

their communities, but themselves—to bolster their personal senses of identity,

community, and self-esteem in the face of racism and white supremacy.

Studies of how individuals interact with their belongings are more likely to be

found in disciplines outside traditional history. Material culture studies of photography

---

[35] Kelley, 9-10. While Kelley's subjects are working-class, as opposed to middle-class blacks, this statement holds universal significance.

often take a more personal tack, looking at the ways in which identity grows from, is attached to and reinforced by belongings.[36] Scholars Elizabeth Edwards and Geoffrey Batchen are especially notable for encouraging a material, rather than strictly visual, understanding of photographs, arguing that the ways in which they were used and manipulated are critical indicators of cultural meaning. Scholars of visual culture, meanwhile, have argued for the importance of interaction with images in wider societal and political discourses, especially in reference to images created by historically marginalized and misrepresented populations.[37] While these discussions present the potential of photographs for reinterpreting dominant narratives, they operate largely on a philosophical level, not firmly situated in any historical framework.

An objective of this study is to bring ideas from all of the above areas—social history, visual culture, and material culture—into dialogue, grounding the theoretical discussion more solidly within the historical context than other scholars have done. Essential to the complex nature of photographs is the fact that they are both visual (two-dimensional images to be looked at) *and* material, three-dimensional objects to be held, interacted with, displayed, distributed, and otherwise manipulated. Most studies of historical photographs divorce their visuality from their materiality, examining image

---

[36] See Patricia Holland, "History, Memory, and the Family Album," cited previously; Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi, "Why We Need Things," in *History from Things*, Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, eds. (Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993): 20-29; and Julia Hirsch's *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning, and Effect* (New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981).

[37] Shawn Michelle Smith is especially notable for her studies of the creation of racial and gender identity through images, and for relating black visual culture to theoretical racial ideas like Du Bois's "double consciousness," the "second sight," the veil, and the mask.

content only and overlooking physical characteristics such as format, processes of creation, and modification.[38] Similarly, studies of family photos, rare to begin with, tend to deal with either their private *or* their public implications, understanding how they are created, used, and understood by their private owners as distinct from their "public" significance as reflections of and/or participation in larger cultural narratives.

I argue that there should be no separation between object and image or between private and public in the interpretation of family photographs. These are not dichotomies at all, but simultaneous co-participants in the creation of photographic meaning. The ways photographs are used and manipulated by individuals in the private realm are just as much a product of cultural, societal, political, and historical circumstances as is their visual content.[39] Similarly, the private uses and functions of photographs within the home represent responses to and participation in public narratives—of race, religion, class, and region which work together to shape individual identity.[40] Photographs thus represent one of many ways the "public" realm infiltrates the "private," and vice versa.

This study of the Pope portraits has important implications for an increasingly interdisciplinary approach to the study of history. By examining historical family

---

[38] Elizabeth Edwards, "Material Beings: Objecthood and Ethnographic Photographs"; *Visual Studies* 17 (1), 2002: 67-75; Martha A. Sandweiss, "The Faithful Image of Our Time," in *Photography in Nineteenth Century America*, Martha A. Sandweiss, ed. (Fort Worth, Texas: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1991).

[39] Elizabeth Edwards, "Photographs as Objects of Memory." In *Material Memories: Design and Evocation,* Marcus Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley, eds. (Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999), 223.

[40] Patricia Holland, "History, Memory, and the Family Album." In *Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography.* Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, eds. (London: Virago Press, 1991), 3.

photographs simultaneously as objects and as images, with interconnected personal and universal significance, this work encourages and suggests ways in which the disciplines of history, material culture, and visual culture might converge in future studies. Further, it illuminates how family photographs can serve as valuable primary source documents in the study of social history, and serve as a model for how such interpretations could proceed. Many historians tend to use images solely as illustrative material, overlooking their promise as records equally as rich, and in some cases richer, than written texts. As Douglas Daniels writes, "photographs are at least as appropriate as written records for documenting the social history of ordinary citizens. This popular medium touches more lives, in a more personal manner, than written literature."[41] Daniels' statement holds particularly true for populations like African Americans, to whom both words and images have historically been applied in demeaning, racist, and slanderous ways.

The Pope family photos are not straightforward, purely factual documents, but rather primary sources that must be read and evaluated as any written text would be. Many photo-historians have noted the pitfalls of using photographs as "readable" documents—the dangers of assigning intentionality to a situation that may have been entirely accidental, in trying to extract truth from a medium known for its distortion of reality. Further, the process of framing photographs historically requires a level of experiential re-enactment that in many cases is simply not possible. While no study can entirely avoid these pitfalls, this one sidesteps many of them for two reasons: because it is a study of portraiture, in which a level of intentionality is assumed; and because the

---

[41] Daniels, 5.

emphasis is not on extracting truth directly from the images themselves, but on postulating how their subjects understood and used the images within the given historical context. While historians may not be able to wring whole truths from photographs, we can use them to great effect—in association with other types of evidence—as part of our ongoing quest to understand the motivations of those whose lives we investigate.

At the same time, we must recognize the limitations and abnormalities of these sources. For one, as it has been noted, photography is an extremely complex, subjective, and living medium, of which verbal interpretation can only go so far. There are simply some aspects of visual experience that cannot be explained, let alone expressed through language. Further, it remains that as much as we try to recreate historical context and to empathize with historical actors, we can only go so far in this endeavor without entering to the realm of speculation. The meanings of photography have changed significantly in the time since the process was invented, in ways that scholars have only begun to explore.

Any reading of primary historical sources is done through a number of "filters"— of events that have occurred since, of current societal issues, and of personal experience. As Geoffrey Batchen writes, "The critical historian's task is not to uncover a secret or lost meaning but to articulate the intelligibility of these objects for our own time."[42] It is my hope that this preliminary study of such a powerful and communicative group of objects as the Pope photographs can contribute to our ongoing negotiations within race relations in the present and future. By reading sources like these as challenges to the dominant

---

[42] Geoffrey Batchen, "Vernacular Photographies," *History of Photography* 24 (3), Autumn 2000, 269.

historical narrative, by embracing the complexity of the past and of the remnants its

inhabitants have left for us, we can confront our dark and divided history, and truly begin

the work that is necessary to move beyond it.

CHAPTER II

OBJECTS OF VALUE

If there are any old pictures around there of Sister Lydia's, please save them for me.
I have lost somehow every picture I had of her. I planned to ask you for my mother's,
the one that hung in your living room, but I understand someone was ahead of me.

--Annie W. Jones, sister of Dr. Manassa Pope's first wife Lydia,
to Delia Pope (his second wife), December 5, 1934

Not long after Louis Daguerre introduced his daguerreotype process in 1839,

African Americans began creating their own photographic images. During the first

decades of the existence of photography, free black men and women established

themselves as professional photographers, recording their communities primarily through

portraiture.[43] As photographic technology advanced with lightning speed during the mid-

to-late nineteenth century, processes became simpler and more accessible, the number of

portrait studios exploded in American cities, and black families from all walks of life

sought out with great eagerness the opportunity to document themselves by having

portraits made.

Like most people in the nineteenth century, by taking portraits of themselves,

African Americans were assuredly enjoying the marvel of this newly-available

technology. From the beginning, the photographic process and the visual objects that

resulted held an exclusive, somehow magical power: the ability to capture and hold a

---

[43] Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present* (New York: W. W. Norton & Co., Inc.: 2000), xv-xvi.

unique, nonrepeatable instant of time, and to recall the presence of someone or something far removed. Most importantly, many in the nineteenth century believed in photography's ability to document and reproduce reality with impartiality and honesty, and in the case of portraiture, to communicate the sitter's "true moral character" merely through physical appearance.[44] Because of photography's distinctive power, portraits were, and continue to be, no ordinary belongings. In addition to being singular and irreplaceable, photographs became an essential piece of the material domestic realm as objects that "represented" their owners' values and priorities. From the first decades of photography's inception, thus, photographic objects took on complex associations of identity to those who owned them.

By the turn of the twentieth century photography had moved "more directly into the national psyche," due to the introduction of mass production, the first affordable cameras, as well as the newfound ability of newspapers and other publications to publish images directly using halftone printing. [45] In turn, harmful, racist imagery reached new heights in American culture. For African American families like the Popes in the Jim Crow South at this time, photographs were objects of special and intense value, especially miraculous for a people who had been denied control over the very aspects of life—identity, relationships, self-image—that photographs served to affirm. The yoke of slavery having been only recently removed, African Americans at this time continued to

---

[44] Alan Trachtenberg, "Photography: The Emergence of a Keyword," in *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, 17-18. See also McCandless, 55.

[45] Willis, 35, Tagg, 55-56, and Trachtenberg, "Photography: The Emergence of a Keyword," 33.

face insult, oppression, discrimination, and the denial of basic entitlements in Southern society. Family photographs could help black families both to oppose the system imposed on them, as well as to help find ways to work within, and even rise above, that system.

Black photography, in one sense, served as a political tool of resistance to the "rules" of everyday existence imposed by Jim Crow society. bell hooks describes the "cultural passion" of African Americans for photography as a tool of empowerment in a white culture seeking not only to refuse them authority, but to misrepresent them: "When the psychohistory of a people is marked by ongoing loss, when entire histories are denied, hidden, erased, documentation may become an obsession."[46] In a culture flooded with negative, stereotypical imagery, blacks wrested control of their own representation away from institutions such as the popular media, law enforcement, and "scientific" anthropological research, all of which served to establish racist ideas and reiterate the social order through visual imagery.[47]

Photographs also offered a means by which blacks could elevate themselves above such stereotypes. In one sense, portraits were an escape route —a way to create alternate and idealized pasts, presents, and futures for themselves when life in the real world could be all too harsh. People went to portrait studios not only because portrait studios guaranteed an expected product, but because they allowed clients a temporary "immunity from reality. "[48] If photographs offered a reprieve from the bleakness of life

---

[46] hooks, 48.

[47] Harris' *Colored Pictures*, 14-40, Painter's article on Sojourner Truth, 485-486, and Smith's *Photography on the Color Line*, 25-76.

[48] Hirsch, 70.

under Jim Crow, however, they also served as tools to help their African American owners survive, adapt, and even flourish within that context—to show the numbers and dimensionality of the black community, highlighting and honoring all of the attainments and abilities of which its members were truly capable. Many African Americans at this time had portraits made in order to celebrate their achievements, to create an image that communicated a sense of self and self-worth.[49]

Even if whites never saw these images, they served nonetheless to counter white supremacy by combating the internalized effects of racism on African American people and families. By surrounding themselves with their photographs, black families could create an encouraging and supportive niche of self- and community-imagining that both bolstered them against the attacks of white supremacist society, and helped them to resist its oppressive nature. The positive effects conferred by photographs within African American homes carried over to their dealings with society at large.

Studying the utilization of photographic objects by their African American owners in the Jim Crow South reveals the type of politics at work wherein ordinary people struggle to improve, protect, express, and imagine better lives for themselves— what Robin D. G. Kelley calls "tiny acts of rebellion and survival."[50] Even those aspects of keeping photographs that might be considered personal were products of political intentionality which had consequences for their collectors, and in turn, for society at large. The display, inscription, and distribution of portraits represented actions taken on a

---

[49] Willis, *Reflections in Black,* xvii.

[50] Kelley, 7.

small, private scale that had much larger implications, illustrating and even strengthening

African American agency, individuality, self-esteem, community, and claims to rights

and status. Family photographs present an important opportunity to connect everyday

strategies with formal, traditionally "political" struggles.

Key to interpreting the meanings of family photographs is the understanding that

in addition to being images designed to send certain messages or document certain

aspects of life, they are also objects—belongings that are sought out, purchased, kept,

used, exchanged, and modified. They not only convey a family's history, they have a

history, and a life, of their own. They are valued by their owners for their tangible as well

as interpreted qualities. While analysis of photographs often detaches them from their

physical properties, focusing solely on their visual content, photographs are in fact

material objects that exist in time and space, and thus in social and cultural contexts.[51]

Thinking about photographs as material culture includes examining the processes of

intention—making, using, distributing, discarding, and recycling—which affect the ways

in which the meaning of photographs as images should be interpreted.[52] To get at cultural

meaning, one must examine the acts of intention behind the creation and use of family

photograph collections.

In the introduction to this study, it was argued that family photographs should be

considered interconnectedly and simultaneously as objects and images, private and public

---

[51] See Tagg, 188; Wajda, 177; Edwards, "Material Beings" and "Photographs as Objects of Memory"; and Edwards and Hart.

[52] Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, "Introduction: Photographs as Objects," in *Photographs Objects Histories*, Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds. (London and New York: Routledge, 2004), 1.

statements, which collectively provide evidence of active identity construction and individual agency. The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the Pope family photograph collection, considering in a general sense not just the content but also the materiality of the collection—its extent, organization, format, and how the objects within the collection were displayed, documented, and distributed—as a means of better understanding their value and meaning to those who kept them. Such acts of purposefulness, of active and physical creation and shaping of representation, provide important evidence of political agency under segregation among African Americans at the individual, everyday level.

To try and see all of these dynamics of value and intention at work in the Pope photos, we should begin with a general overview of the collection as it existed when I first encountered it, in the summer of 2003. I worked that summer as a volunteer intern for the Pope House Museum Foundation and was given the task of unpacking and attempting the first preliminary consolidation and organization of the family's photographs.[53] The photos had been left, presumably by family members and friends who had assisted with cleanup at the time of Ruth Pope's death the year before, essentially in a pile of unlabelled boxes, bags, a few albums, and other containers. Framed items had been left framed, but removed from their original display context within the house. Some representative portraits of Manassa, Delia, Ruth and Evelyn Pope had been pulled and

---

[53] It is noteworthy that these represent unusual circumstances under which to analyze primary sources, which are typically first viewed by a researcher already in a repository or archive, most often already processed by an archivist. In this case, I served both archivist and researcher, although at the time I was serving as the former, I didn't yet realize I would become the latter.

separated by the Museum director for his own research. The collection had very little documentation save for the occasional scribble on the back of a photo, and essentially no existing organization that was apparent. There was no way to know which photos had belonged to whom, or whether they had been in the house all along or brought there by friends or family members.

As for the collection's most basic physical qualities, as a whole it contains approximately 1,000 images, dating from as the Civil War era up until Ruth Pope's death in 2002.[54] Formats represented include a small number of tintypes, photographic postcards, and a few later examples of reproduction in different forms such as on hand-colored enamel, on the backs of mirrors, on buttons or lapel pins, and enlarged drawings. The vast majority are photographic prints of various types which enjoyed popularity in the period covered by the collection: albumen, platinum, and twentieth-century developing-out print types most common among them. The majority of the images in the collection would appropriately be called cabinet cards, designed specifically for exchange and display. At the time of my organization attempt, approximately forty images remained in frames of many different sizes, shapes, and levels of ornamentation; in a few cases, multiple copies of the same image had been framed, leading to the suspicion that the collections of multiple family members may have at some point been merged. Only a few physical photo albums existed or had remained intact; almost all of the photos were loose, either mounted on cardboard or still in the envelope or mat enclosure provided by the photographer/studio.

---

[54] The overall lack of documentation of the collection makes dating highly subjective.

Surveyed as a whole, as far as can be determined, the content of the photographs in the Pope collection breaks roughly in two halves: those that portray the immediate members of the Pope family; and those that are of friends or more distant relatives whose family connection it is difficult or impossible to ascertain. Of the former category, the vast majority date from after the 1950s and either depict or were obviously connected to the Pope daughters, Ruth and Evelyn. The later the images, the more likely they are to be candid, spontaneous shots of parties, holidays, vacations, or other special occasions. The settings, moods, image content, and even image quality become less and less consistent with the progression of time.

The earlier, mostly formal studio portraits from the Pope collection dating to the late nineteenth-early twentieth centuries, however, are of foremost concern to the analysis in this and the following two chapters. Although dating images within this period is somewhat inconclusive, I am attempting to focus primarily on those created or used by the Popes during the period from 1890 to 1930. It was within these decades that the family as a whole was most intensely involved and visible in their community, and that several key events took place: the Spanish-American War; the White Supremacy propaganda campaign in North Carolina, culminating in the disfranchisement amendment; and Dr. Pope's run for mayor of Raleigh in 1919. This period is also considered the "nadir" of American race relations post-slavery—a time of heightened violence and the most egregious scaling back of black civil rights, especially in North Carolina, where they had previously enjoyed significant political power.

Because I am concerned chiefly with how the Pope family sought to use their photographs simultaneously as belongings, as claims to status, and as larger social and political statements, my focus is on formal, posed photographs that were popular with the white middle class during this period. The photographer's studio was a highly controlled and idealized environment; African Americans knew exactly what they were getting when they sought to have these portraits made. The photographers themselves undoubtedly played a crucial role in composition and setting, and especially in the appearance and formats of the material photographic objects that resulted. While the Pope collection represents a virtual treasure trove for anyone seeking to research Southern black photographers, my focus is on the subjects, who also exercised undeniable authority over the creation of portraits—why, when, and how they were made, which photographers they patronized, the clothing and facial expressions they wore, and what they did with the portraits afterward. In the Popes' case, there is evidence that at least some of their portraits were taken inside their home, where they would likely have had more control.[55] The fact that black families like the Popes participated so eagerly in established conventions of formal portraiture is in itself an expression of their desire to control how they were represented visually.

In the portraits dating from 1890-1930, the Popes themselves, especially Dr. Pope, are not much of a presence. Shots of the four of them—Dr. Pope, Delia, Evelyn, and Ruth—together during this period are not to be found. This is not to say that photos of the Popes do not exist, but if they do, they are no longer a part of the family's

---

[55] See, for example, the portrait of Evelyn and Ruth (Figure 32) discussed in Chapter Three.

collection. Exchange practices may account for some of this: the vast majority are studio portraits of friends and relatives, given or sent to the Popes, presumably in exchange for images of themselves. Portraits of children are quite numerous, and there are a few group portraits. Images depicting cross-gender couples are also quite rare. Most of the early portraits portray individual, adult subjects.

As opposed to later photos in the collection, the subject matter and composition of these early, formal portraits are remarkably uniform, suggesting a stronger intent of purpose behind their creation. A survey of these images reveals conventions much in keeping with middle-class photography of the period. Subjects show signs of wealth— they are typically very well-dressed, ornamented with jewelry and crosses, posed before sometimes elaborate backgrounds featuring props like columns, easels, and ornate furniture. They wear solemn and dignified expressions, and many are posed seemingly in the midst of intellectual activity, such as reading a book or letter (see Figs. 1-3). Interestingly, many the portraits seem to have been arranged to capture the naturalness of such activities for African Americans. Figure 1 is notable for its rustic backdrop, contributing to the idea that the subject has just been caught in a quiet moment, enjoying a book in the pleasant out-of-doors. The subject of Figure 2 does not even look at the camera, so engrossed is he in the letter he appears to have only just opened; since his face is not visible, it is almost as if his action is the intended subject rather than the man himself. Meanwhile, the stylish lady in Figure 3, having entered the plush domestic environment depicted, seems not to have had the chance to lay down her umbrella. These images portray people comfortably engaged in routine, everyday activities. At least one

objective seems to be to make these African-American subjects appear at home and at

ease in environments of wealth and intellectual endeavor.
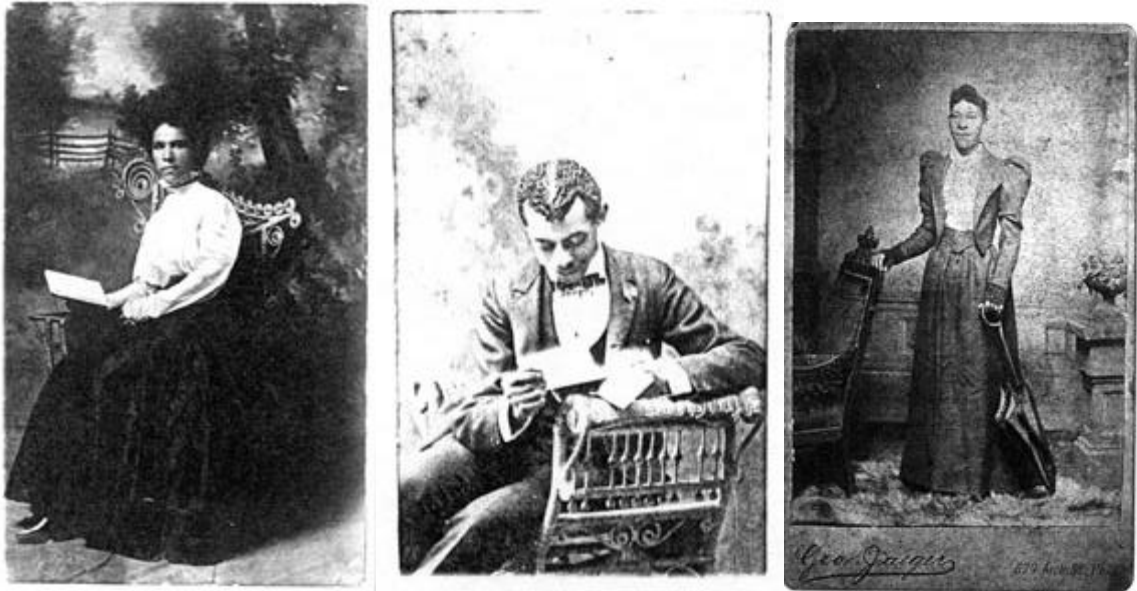
Figs. 1-3. Fig. 1: Unidentified portrait from the Pope collection, ca. 1890s. Fig. 2: Unidentified
portrait, Raleigh, NC, ca. 1890s. A. Michelow, photographer.
Fig. 3: Unidentified portrait, Philadelphia, PA, ca. 1900s. George Jaeger, photographer.

The overall outward impression given by the visual content of these portraits is

very well-aligned with Kevin Gaines's assessment of a grassroots-level effort on the part

of blacks to use photography to permeate their images with dignity and success, and to

"embody the 'representative' Negro by which the race might more accurately be

judged."[56] The race's representatives, as envisioned in these photographs, were wealthy,

successful, intelligent, and ambitious, and naturally so. They belonged in the privileged

world they inhabited in these portraits. It was as rightfully theirs as it was anyone's, and

they were moving in. In this way, the portraits make a visual statement that is tied to

---

[56] Gaines, 68.

formal political struggles: African Americans were indeed capable and deserving of the full rights of citizenship being denied them.

Beyond the visual statements made by the early Pope portraits, the ways in which they were physically modified and used also indicated personal value and manifested political intent. The images in Figures 4 and 5 are fascinating illustrations of this concept. Of significance is the fact that both images are formal portraits of African American women depicted interacting with portraits – lying open on the table on which the girl rests her hand in Figure 4, and held closely by the woman in front of the fireplace in Figure 5. These "portraits of portraits" dramatically exemplify the symbiotic nature of photographs—and their creators' understanding of that nature—as both visual messages and objects with tangible importance. Geoffrey Batchen has observed this phenomenon with regard to earlier daguerreotypes which portray subjects holding or displaying other daguerreotypes. "It is as though these people draw our attention not to a particular image but to the brute objectness of photography in general, to the comforting solidity of its memorial function," writes Batchen.[57] Through the visual medium, in other words, the subjects of these images instruct us of the value of photographs as objects. At the same time, the women appear in these portraits to have recently been looking at the images they have at hand, inferring the importance of their visuality as well. When we, in the present day, look at and hold these portraits from the Pope collection, we become participants in this stunted "infinity mirror" of viewing and interacting physically with photographs.

---

[57] Batchen, 263.

Figs. 4 and 5. Fig. 4: Unidentified portrait, Boston, ca. 1900s. Fig. 5: Unidentified portrait, Charleston, SC, ca. 1910s.[58]

A primary, compelling example of the use of photographs as material objects is how they were domestically displayed. Photographs in the home during this period became a crucial part of the décor, pieces of domestic architecture that could also play a "didactic" role as a "potent means of achieving desirable social and cultural ends."[59] It was common practice for fireplace mantels to be overflowing, and walls hung with numerous large framed portraits.[60] "Better-class" African Americans followed this trend with great enthusiasm in their own homes, as is evident from a variety of historical sources.

[58] Fig. 5 bears the name Tyson, which could refer to either the subject or the photographer.

[59] William S. Ayres, "Pictures in the American Home, 1880-1930," in *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*, Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Manning, eds. (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994), 150.

[60] Batchen, 267.

The numerous portraits still in frames at the Pope House, at least forty, indicates the family's eager participation in the custom of domestic photographic exhibition. The Pope parlor/living room in particular was a showcase for portraits, as indicated in the letter quoted at the beginning of this chapter. Figures 6 and 7 are portraits of Dr. Manassa Pope's parents, Jonas Elias and Ruth Permelia Pope. Large crayon photograph reproductions of these portraits hung in the Pope's living room, indicating their special significance. These were apparently displayed, before Lydia Pope's death, alongside a portrait of her own mother. It is likely that similar portraits of Delia's parents replaced it once Delia had moved into the house as Dr. Pope's second wife. It is also reasonable to expect that given the variety of frames and formats in the Pope collection, more portraits than just the large reproductions were exhibited in their living room. The display of portraits in the parlor is significant in light of Shirley Wajda's description of the Victorian parlor as a "public" space where the family identity and values were defined to visitors.[61] The Popes' display of portraits, therefore, indicates not just their participation in wider conventions of domesticity, but also the values of family history and lineage they wanted to emphasize to the "public."

---

[61] Wajda, 168.
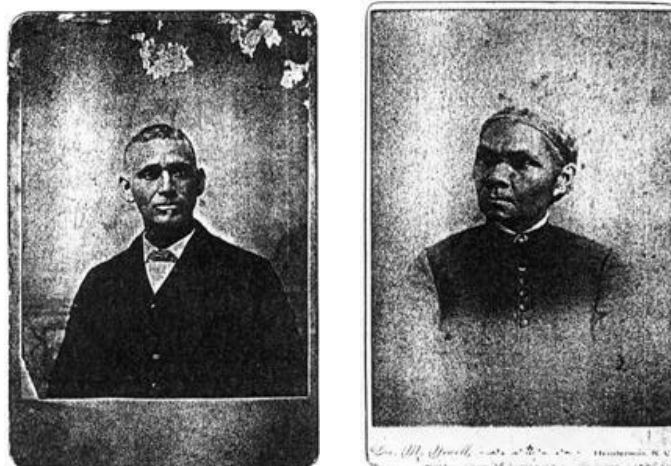
Figs. 6 and 7. Fig. 6: Jonas Elias Pope, ca. 1890s. Fig. 7: Ruth Permelia Pope, ca. 1890s.
Bears the photographer's mark Geo. M. Newell, Henderson, N.C.

Class and social standing also play important roles in this domestic dynamic,

indicating the Pope's desire to insert themselves into the social hierarchy—to both

portray and imagine themselves as equal in status to the white middle class, and to more

generally assert blacks' right and ability to occupy such an echelon. John Tagg has

discussed the association of portraiture with the rising social classes during this period:

middle-class portraits served as "commodities" in themselves, or signifiers of

achievement—to have one's portrait made was one of the "symbolic acts by which

individuals from the rising social classes made their ascent visible to themselves and

others and classed themselves among those who enjoyed social status."[62] The Popes

displayed their portraits in part to declare their own membership in the club of social

privilege, and to demonstrate the potential for the improvement of their race as a whole.

Thus, through not only the visual content but also the physical creation, ownership, and

---

[62] John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories,* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 37.

display of their portraits inside their house, the Popes actively participated in larger social dialogues about class and the nature of blackness.

As material culture scholars have noted, one of the primary functions served by possessions like photographs is as reminders of one's place in social and family networks, as well as larger economic, ethnic, religious, regional, and even global communities.[63] Evidence of the distribution of photographs in the Pope collection, routinely sending copies to and receiving them from friends and loved ones, represents this type of usage. Exchanging portraits reinforced social networks and identity, positioning individuals in relation to the wider group, and linking together their pasts, presents, and potential futures.[64] Because many of the Pope images still bear the photographer's mark, either on the mounting board or the enclosure, it can be deduced that they represent a wide geographic range. The largest number— approximately 200— bear photographer's marks, not surprisingly, from Raleigh.[65] Other east coast cities, especially Richmond, New York City, Philadelphia, and Atlanta are also heavily represented, with a few photos each from other eastern states including Connecticut, Maryland, New Jersey, and Tennessee. Missouri is the most western state represented in the collection, although two portraits from Panama offer evidence of international connections. Photographers' marks offer evidence of the Pope's membership in a wide geographic network of friends, relatives, and associates; exchanging portraits was a customary means of expressing and upholding these connections.

---

[63] See Holland and Csikszentmihalyi.

[64] Edwards, "Photographs as Objects of Memory," 233.

[65] It is likely that many of those without marks also came from Raleigh.

Photographic exchange also served for the Popes as a means of asserting their roles as the elite of the African American community, as "Best Men" and "Best Women." It is likely no coincidence that most of the photographs whose subjects have been identified in writing on the back are of prominent individuals.[66] The collection includes portraits of people like H. P. Cheatham, who served several terms in the U.S. Congress and was an active opponent of the White Supremacy campaign, and his wife; James H. Young, state representative and close advisor to North Carolina governor Daniel Russell; Baptist leaders Reverend James K. and Emma Satterwhite, and Reverend R. E. McCauley; and several other local religious and political figures. By keeping, and possibly displaying, images of such well-known Best Men and Women, the Popes promoted their own status through association.

By participating in the conventions of middle-class portraiture, the Popes also marked their place in a largely urban network of elite African Americans, "New Negroes," who, like the black San Franciscans Douglas Daniels has studied, "valued pictures and relied on them to present their best selves to the world…so that the world could assess their prosperity and note their pride."[67] The geographic representation of the Pope portraits shows substantial connections to wealthy African American urban communities in Richmond, Virginia, New York City, Atlanta, Georgia, and Philadelphia, but Daniels' study makes clear that this was a phenomenon not limited to eastern cities. Photography was a crucial arena for the visualization of the growing "New Negro"

---

[66] It should be noted that it is unknown when these identifications were made, and the reason could simply be that these individuals were more easily recognizable.

[67] Daniels, 9.

movement, marked by an expressive culture and general unwillingness to stay in the "place" assigned by white supremacy. The Pope family portraits are themselves such a pleasing gallery, and represent the family's participation in the broader revisualization of the race at the turn of the twentieth century.

Another notable physical quality of photographs which can assist in interpreting their meaning and value is how they are documented or inscribed. Inscriptions in particular are compelling reminders that photographs not only document the lives of people, they have lives of their own as objects that change physically through time.[68] It was noted earlier that beyond photographer's marks, there is very little identification or documentation of the portraits in the collection.[69] The rare examples in the Pope collection that have been inscribed, however, offer interesting, unexpected, and sometimes mysterious clues to how their owners viewed them. Several images have their subjects identified in captions hand-written on the reverse, although it is unknown when this was done or by whom, or how accurate the identifications are.

More intriguing are the precious few instances of portraits that were sent to members of the Pope family which bear original notes from the senders/subjects. Examples include studio portraits sent to Delia, one of which has no name but reads "I remain your friend as ever," and another which says "From your loving Big Sister, Xmas 1905." The second is especially valuable from a genealogical perspective. Two more

---

[68] Edwards, "Material Beings," 73.

[69] This is common for historic photograph collections and should not necessarily be interpreted as evidence of a lack of care on the family's part.

interesting cases also likely come from Delia's siblings (see Figs. 8 and 9).[70] The

inscription on the back of the image in Figure 8 reads, all in the same handwriting, "This

leaves me tolerable, will write soon. Do you know who this is?" This latter question is

confusing—one might tempted to dismiss it, if not for another photo of and from this

same woman (to be discussed in greater detail in Chapter Four), with an inscription

which reads, "Have you ever seen her before?" While it is impossible to say for sure why

Delia's sister referred to pictures of herself in this manner, one possible interpretation is

that she was implying a difficulty to connect her own idea of herself with the woman in

the photographs; she could not recognize herself in those idealized, posed, constructed

images.

The second example, shown in Figure 9, illustrates a similar disconnect between

the subjects' appearance in the photograph and their own views of themselves, this time

with a humorous slant. "Here we are! The Three [Brandons][71]," the inscription reads.

"Directions for using – Place under door mat. Will exterminate all insects in 24 hours.

Look well before using. For Dr. and Mrs. M. T. Pope." Though clearly meant to be

funny, by implying that their appearance is ugly enough to kill insects, this inscription

---

[70] Piecing together who is who is based largely on guesswork, information on genealogy, numbers of photos of the same people, and how those photos were grouped together. Based on these factors, it appears both Figs. 6 and 7 depict Delia Pope's siblings. Both are striking, well-preserved, and similar in appearance and mount, indicating the possibility that they were taken by the same photographer, possibly even at the same time. Neither bears a photographer's mark.

[71] This is a best guess—the word is illegible.

Figs. 8 and 9. Fig. 8: Unidentified portrait, probably Delia Pope's sister, ca. 1900s.
Fig. 9: Unidentified portrait, probably Delia's brothers, ca. 1900s.

also hints at a level of discomfort on the part of the subjects with their photographic image. In this case, the juxtaposition of the image content—which portrays three very handsome, well-dressed, and confident young men in a refined and elaborate setting— with the inscription on the back of the photo is quite remarkable. If examined carefully, though, their facial expressions do perhaps reveal a gleam of playfulness, mixed with uneasiness, with the process of having their portraits made in such a forced and stiff fashion. So, although it is clear that "better class" African Americans placed great significance both on the practice of portraiture and on the material objects that resulted, these inscriptions offer fascinating evidence of their awareness of the constructed nature of the images they were creating, keeping, and sending to loved ones.

Families like the Popes used portraiture to consciously and actively construct an image of themselves, one that functioned both as reactive opposition to white supremacy, and as proactive definition of racial identity. All of the categories of photographic value discussed here, visual and physical, ideological and personal, are products of intention which, in the given historical context, can and should be considered within the realm of political action. For one, in seeking to have formal portraits like these made, and in displaying, keeping, and distributing them, turn-of-the-century "better class" African Americans made a case for their worthiness for social and political equality. They used their portraits to emphasize that not only did they possess financial means and character traits like dignity, social standing, and intellectual ability—considered essential for full civic participation—but they exercised them naturally. Distribution and exchange networks for portraits evidenced the existence of a wide and growing association of African Americans who fit this definition.

The portraits presented the opportunity to both visualize and normalize the idea of the "New Negro"—this new, confident community of African American individuals with the ability and right to exercise control over the official decisions that would dictate their destiny. These images operated in distinct opposition to those created and disseminated in white supremacist culture. Because the use of photography by better-class blacks like the Popes was primarily about active self-visualization, the fact that white supremacists themselves would not have had much, if any, exposure to these portraits does not render them ineffective. The New Negro image would have held extraordinary power to blacks

themselves, both in reinforcing values of respectability and in offering encouragement to continue the struggle for racial advancement.

In addition to making visual statements, portraits were also material objects that were collected, displayed, handled, and used by their owners in ways that also have political associations. A crucial function of the Pope portraits, equally as significant as the outward expression of status and ideology, is the intangible sensation of support and safety they must have offered to their owners. These belongings allowed African Americans to better cope with racial oppression and to combat its internalized effects by reinforcing identity and self-esteem, confirming community participation and belonging, and as serving as constant reminders of life's priorities. The private uses of photographs, therefore, have implications for broader political debates. Photographs' ability to make one feel proudly and uniquely individual, and yet part of a community, of a movement, of something larger and more important than one's particular existence, adds to these possessions another dimension of value entirely.

CHAPTER III

OBJECTS OF POWER

THE BLACK MAN'S PLEA[72]
By B. Landor

Not only you who wield the civil power,
But you of power, where ere you be;
You of fair mind to whom the gold is
Gold and dross is dross,
In mart or palace, field or shop,
List for a moment to the black man's plea.

'Tis true the truth of man's equality
Was too untimely born, to be, in practice
True, and this will not only apply to men
Of color, but e'en to you, who, thousands have
Of baser mold, than some who bore and bare
The Negro strain. The true equality
Is of the mind, and that is not to be obtained
By written law, for if it were, men would ill
Appreciate that which is so easily got.

We do not scorn the servile work, which comes to
Us, by a kind of common law, but do despise the fact
That, no matter what the progress of the mind,
These servile bonds should bind us still to that
Which has no sign of change.

You'll grant this holds no ideal to the race, and
Further, that a race which has no noble aims,
To which the coming young may pin their faith, has
In itself, no element of progress. We as a race,
Can not assume your ideals, ours, since you yourselves
Will not permit us to advance, to that degree
Where we can call your country 'mine' and mean it
With sincerity.

Then grant us this only boon, and if you do,
We pledge a great advance, from seeming worthlessness
And indolence, to where the Nation will be proud
That she did give so much. This is the boon we ask,
A man's chance. The chance to be progressive men.

---

[72] B. Landor, *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 7 (July 1904): 291.

American culture at the turn of the twentieth century was obsessed with ideas about masculinity. From collective anxiety over the nation's "manliness" to individual concerns over one's own bearing, issues surrounding manhood pervaded everyday discourse.[73] Historians have traced the ways in which this preoccupation developed along racial lines over the course of the nineteenth century, spurred by events surrounding the Civil War. The chance to serve as soldiers presented black men with an opportunity to demonstrate the masculinity that had been denied them under the system of slavery—opportunity to prove not only their bravery in battle, but their worthiness to participate as Americans, to perform their civic duty. This ability was recognized during Reconstruction, if all too briefly, as black men became enfranchised and often politically involved. Encouraged by organizations like the Freedmen's Bureau, the black male appeared on an ambitious course of progress towards true equality.[74]

The success of Redemptionist politics throughout the South entirely derailed this advancement, resulting in a hardening of the color line that reached its peak in the 1890s. America's international imperialist involvements, meanwhile, were contributing to a more paternalist concept of manhood, in which those with darker skin, both at home and abroad, were seen and portrayed as underdeveloped, flailing, incapable of handling their own affairs, and thus in need of guidance. Southern white men took these ideas to heart

---

[73] Martin Summers, *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004), 1.

[74] Christopher Booker, *"'I Will Wear No Chain!': A Social History of African American Males* (Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2000), 101-105.

and applied them with abandon in their own hometowns. Manhood, in their eyes, was about control: the ability to control one's appearance, one's behavior and desires, one's family, finances, and social standing. Such a level of control was a requirement for involvement in official decision-making.[75] Southern white men justified their dominance over African Americans by describing black men as too childlike and too emotional to contribute constructively to society. By rationalizing white supremacy in this way, those in power made necessary the continuous propagation of the social hierarchy in order to maintain their dominance.

Under these circumstances, Jim Crow segregation began to be crystallized, codified, and enforced. Whites understood the physical division of the races as the only way to maintain the power structure, and validated segregation using twisted, circular logic. Blacks should be separated from whites because they were an inferior people, or so the argument went; at the same time, blacks were inferior because they were separate. Meanwhile, however, black men all over the country were disproving stereotypes in their everyday actions by finding employment, earning decent salaries, and leading respectable lives—operating distinctly counter to the popular imagery and moving distinctly out of the "place" designated for them by white society. Since black inferiority was not naturally inherent, southern whites created a social order in which this disparity would be

---

[75] Michael Hatt has argued for "control" as the defining concept of nineteenth century masculinity in "'Making a Man of Him': Masculinity and the Black Body in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture," *Oxford Art Journal* 15, no. 1 (1992), 21-22.

continually acted out and reinforced. For whites, "this performance, in turn, made reality conform to the script."[76]

Popular visual imagery was one of the central stages on which the "performance" of white supremacy was played out. In his book *Colored Pictures*, Michael D. Harris chronicles the use of visual representation during the nineteenth century to establish racist ideas and reiterate the social hierarchy. Popular print material like the Blackville series featured in *Harper's Weekly* and the Currier & Ives "Darktown" prints portrayed blacks trying to participate in middle-class activities and failing embarrassingly.[77] Most of the early imagery of blacks depicted men. Christopher Booker summarizes the different types of derogatory characterizations ascribed to the African American male: the "black beast," the smiling, ignorant Sambo, and the incorrigible chicken thief.[78] These depictions in print media were continuations of the popular mid-nineteenth century minstrel show, and were rooted, according to Harris, in a widespread "fascination/horror with blackness."[79]

With increasing commercialization, advertising became a common forum for stereotypes, as companies exploited this fascination to draw attention to their products. An advertisement for the popular Bull Durham tobacco, made in Durham, NC, is a typical example (see Fig. 10): two silly-looking, outlandishly-dressed black men and a child are equipped for hunting, but have forgotten a match with which to light their cigarettes. Blacks could try to imitate the activities of whites, the ad implies, but in the

---

[76] Hale, 284.

[77] Harris, 57.

[78] Booker, 124.

[79] Harris, 63.

end they were too incompetent to do them properly. Images like this helped make a case

for the inferiority of black males, and for their separation and subordination in society.
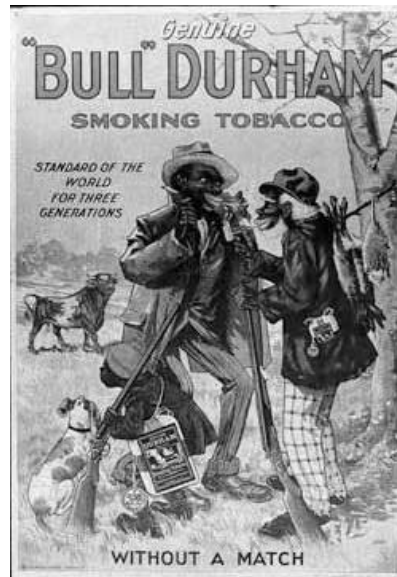
Figure 10. Bull Durham Tobacco advertisement, ca. 1900. [80]

North Carolina in the late 1890s was the setting for an exceptionally malicious

example of the use of stereotypical images to produce a desired social and political

outcome. Following the successful "fusion" of the Republican and Populist parties which

led to the election of numerous African Americans to public office in 1896, Democrats

devised a scheme to recoup their losses: by propagating the myth of "Negro domination,"

a common Redemptionist strategy. Primarily through the use of political cartoons

published in Raleigh's *News and Observer* (its editor, Josephus Daniels, was a prominent

and powerful Democrat), Democratic leaders waged a vicious and sensationalistic

---

[80] *History of Jim Crow* website <http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/history/history.htm> (accessed 13 April 2005).

pictorial campaign against the state's African Americans designed to influence rural whites into voting a racial rather than a party ticket.[81] The campaign, to be discussed more explicitly later in this chapter, was extraordinarily successful, resulting in the fusionists being swept from office in 1898, the passage of Jim Crow laws in 1899, and finally, the disfranchisement of most African American men in 1900. The White Supremacy campaign is a striking example of the capability of imagery to influence the popular consciousness.

While the constant barrage of demeaning images certainly must have had diminishing psychological affects on black men, many refused to accept the roles assigned them in the grand performance of white supremacy. Using a variety of methods, some boldly public and some more private and quotidian, Southern black men constructed and expressed their own masculine identities. Martin Summers writes:

> Black men…were not merely screens on which white men projected their anxieties about manhood. Nor did black men reduce their gender identity to a measure of political and economic citizenship or an expression of resistance to the various forms of marginalization to which they were subjected. [African American men]…imagined and performed a gendered self in a number of different sites, through a number of different modalities…[82]

Black men's expression of manhood, in other words, represented more than opposition to racism; it served personal purposes as well, allowing black men to exert control, that manliest of abilities, over their lives and self-perceptions.

---

[81] Helen G. Edmonds, *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951), 140-142.

[82] Summers, 290.

Photography was one method through which better-class black men like Dr. Manassa T. Pope envisioned manhood, acted out gender identity, and articulated personal power. It is clear that in the highly contested historical context of the Jim Crow South, white supremacists used images as weapons in social discourse—tools for manipulating popular ideas about power, and for maintaining power structures already in place. Their visual campaign was particularly successful because it could be waged in the public eye, with the added benefit of being understandable by illiterates (as many poor whites were). This does not mean, however, that black men were entirely defenseless against it; in fact, by creating and keeping portraits, they waged a counter-campaign of their own, behind the scenes. This chapter will explore the Pope photographs, particularly those relating directly to Dr. Pope, as objects of power in their own right in that they could reclaim and reassert personal power threatened by the dominant culture.

One of the central arguments of this thesis is that any study of photographs must incorporate their role as objects—possessions that are obtained, owned, and used—and as part of wider social and political conversations about race, class, and gender. The Pope portraits created around the time of white supremacy campaign in North Carolina, roughly 1890 to 1920, operated simultaneously as a visual archive in distinct contradiction to popular imagery, as evidence of agency and active identity construction among black men, and, in their role as belongings, as means of personal support and affirmation in the face of white supremacist assaults.

Dr. Pope, as an affluent, politically-minded black man in white supremacist society, expressed himself through different aspects of his life: his religion, his leisure

activities, his family, and his civic involvements. His capacities as a member of the

rising black "better class," a doctor, a North Carolinian, and a soldier in the Spanish-

American War presented arenas in which visual imagery took on heightened importance

both as a means of attack and of deflection.

The best way to resist and actively counter racist images and stereotypes they

propagated, according to Michael Harris, was to "avoid any posture resembling the

images," and going further, to attempt to exemplify a bearing exactly opposite.[83] This

was a mission accepted with greatest fervor by the growing Southern class of "Black Best

Men," a term used by historian Glenda Gilmore, of which Dr. Manassa T. Pope was a

member. Gilmore discusses how North Carolina's prominent blacks latched on to the

Reconstruction-era Southern ideology of the "Best Man" because it fit with their own

ideas of morality and social responsibility—but it also fit with the image of manliness

blacks needed to convey. In other words, in order to prove themselves as true men, blacks

would have to buy in wholeheartedly to definitions of manhood as understood by the

white power structure.[84]

Black Best Men were proper, proud, refined, well-dressed, successful, yet socially

responsible gentlemen. "The Best Man pursued higher education, married a pious

woman, and fathered accomplished children," Gilmore writes. "He participated in

religious activities…and extended benevolence to the less fortunate."[85] In a 1925 essay,

black sociologist E. Franklin Frazier wrote of Durham, North Carolina as a model of

---

[83] Harris, 82.

[84] Summers, 111.

[85] Gilmore, 62.

American black business enterprise: "No longer can men say that the Negro is lazy and shiftless and a consumer. He has gone to work. He is a producer. His is respectable. He has a middle class.'[86] It was this new, dignified, successful brand of African American male that could most powerfully refute white supremacy, and as a result, came under the most severe attack.

Portraiture was an important means by which black men could envision and embody the idea of the Best Man, while offering a visual alternative to racist imagery. Numerous photos in the Pope family collection exemplify this concept (see Figures 11-13). Figure 11 is a striking example of how clothing, accessories, posture, and backdrop could be used in a portrait to assign certain intangible qualities to its subject. This unidentified man is dressed impeccably, down to the boutonniere on his lapel; he poses somewhat jauntily, looking off with an expression of aloof self-possession; while the easel and archery target visible in the background lend him an air of culture and refinement. The subject of the next portrait (Fig. 12), identified as Louis McLarion of Atlanta, is enveloped by an even more elaborate setting, while the third subject appears in close-up, eyeing the camera with an unconcerned, yet defiant intensity (Fig. 13).[87] The men in these portraits appear poised, strong, confident, affluent, and nothing if not in control.

---

[86] E. Franklin Frazier, "Durham: Capital of the Black Middle Class," in Alain Locke, *The New Negro: An Interpretation* (New York: Albert and Charles Boni, Inc., 1925), 333.

[87] Of particular note is that the second and third portraits were taken by Thomas E. Askew, a prominent black photographer in Atlanta, credited with taking at least some of the portraits from W.E.B. Du Bois' Negro Album from the 1900 Paris Exhibition.
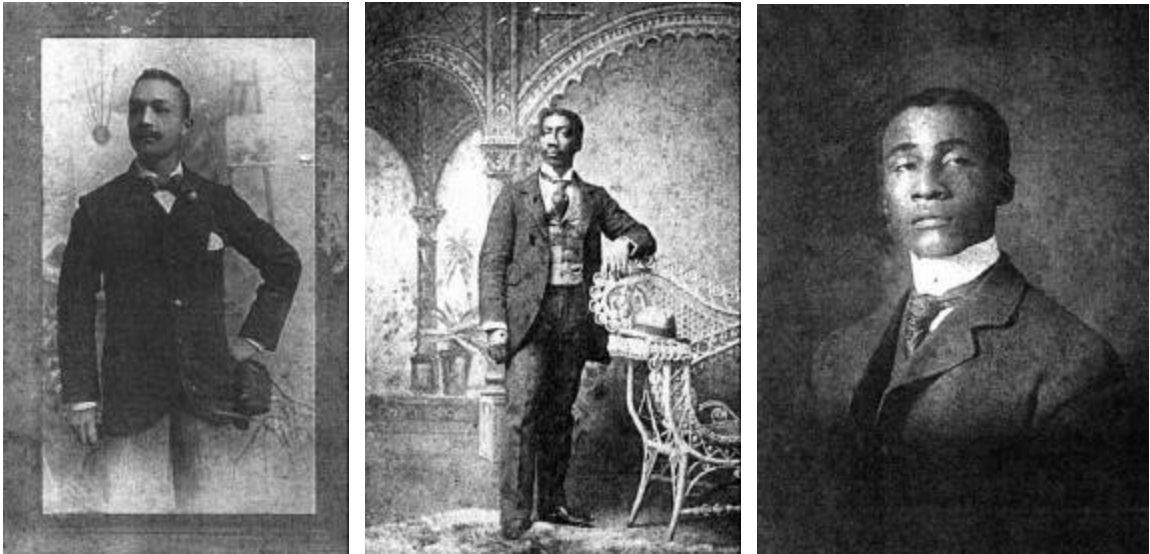
Figs. 11-13. Fig. 11: Unidentified portrait, ca. 1890s. Fig. 12: Mr. Louis McLarion of Atlanta, GA, ca. 1890s. Thomas E. Askew, photographer. Fig. 13: Unidentified portrait, ca. 1900s. Thomas E. Askew, photographer.

The visualization of the Black Best Man in portraiture served a further purpose, in fitting with the concept of "Uplift" ideology and social responsibility among the South's black elite. Glenda Gilmore describes how Black Best Men viewed class as a marker of manhood, and believed devoutly in their duty to set an example for and positively influence the behavior of lower-class blacks. The sort of gentlemanliness captured in these photos, then, was in their minds a model to which less fortunate blacks should aspire in order to further the cause of racial progress. In the face of white supremacist attacks targeted specifically toward black Best Men, however, these functions would have taken a back seat to the necessity of defense. "Reliance on the Best Man ideal meant that African Americans constantly had to prove their manhood in order to maintain civil rights…," writes Gilmore. "If a certain black man led an exemplary life, whites still held

him accountable for the conduct of his entire race."[88] Though these portraits were taken of individuals, thus, they could also represent to whites a level of deportment of which black men as a whole were capable.

An important consideration is that in addition to sending visual messages, these "Best Man" portraits were also physical objects that were purchased, collected, and distributed. Although there is little evidence in the Pope photo collection to suggest that Dr. Pope himself was sending and receiving portraits, the geographic representation of cities like Atlanta, Richmond, New York, and Boston in the collection signifies his participation in an urban network of black male professionals.[89] In his ownership of portraits like those in Figures 11-13, Dr. Pope exercised his membership in a growing, largely urban community of black Best Men who shared his ideals and ambitions. Such collective affirmation must have been a great source of comfort, as well as inner strength, to him and to his peers.

Meanwhile, some forms of popular imagery belied white frustration at black progress and the perceived competition it posed, while hinting at the very real threat of retaliation. An image from a 1909 piece of sheet music—another remnant of minstrelsy—is one multilayered example (See Figure 14). Playing on the chicken thief stereotype, the song is entitled "I Am That 'Hen Roost' Inspector Man," and is a first-person account of a man who has obtained a job as a "chicken inspector." Its cover image

---

[88] Gilmore, 63.

[89] As will be discussed in Chapter Three, the strongest evidence suggests that the women of the Pope family took primary responsibility for the shaping and maintenance of their photo collection.

depicts a uniformed, caricatured black man, in the dark of night, being caught in the act of raiding a white farmer's chicken coop. The type of uniform he wears, nearly identical to a Pullman Porter's, is likely not a random selection. The job of Pullman Porter was one of the best a black man could aspire to, both in status and in pay. The image sheds light on white ideas about the black "professional"— while he may have given himself an official title and uniform, feeling accomplished, in reality he is just up to his old tricks of thievery. Meanwhile, the trap snagged on the robber's foot and the dog at his coattails imply a loaded warning: black men who defy the racial order would ultimately be caught, and punished, for their transgressions.

Figure 14. Cover of sheet music for "I Am That 'Hen Roost' Inspector Man," by Lew Payton and Alf. Wilson, 1909.[90]

---

[90] Lew Payton and Alf. Wilson, "I Am That 'Hen Roost' Inspector Man," 1909. Historic Sheet Music Collection, Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/sheetmusic/> (accessed 14 April 2005).

In spite of the threat of physical or other retaliation, black men continued to professionalize and as Wilmoth Carter writes, "..rejected the inferior status imputed to them, seeking to raise their status through sharing of opportunities and resources."[91] A group portrait of Pullman Porters from the Pope collection (Fig. 15) stands in contrast to image of the professional black man presented in the "Hen Roost" sheet music. The unidentified men in this portrait represent a variety of age groups, and judging from the presence of the woman in the center of the photo, could have a family connection. While the occasion for having this portrait taken is unknown, it is noteworthy that these Porters desired to be photographed in their uniforms. The impression this image gives is not of brazen black men trying to steal anything from whites, but rather of regular, hardworking people trying only to earn a decent income and a measure of self-respect.

Fig. 15. Group portrait of Pullman Porters and unknown woman, ca. 1900.

---

[91] Wilmoth A. Carter, *The Urban Negro in the South* (New York: Vantage Press, 1961), 243.

Photographs like the Pope portraits also operated as tools in opposition to that strongest statement of white power over blacks—the most immediate threat to ideological as well as physical manhood, that reached its peak in the South during the 1890s—lynching. The specter of lynching hung constantly over black men, as hundreds were murdered for even the slightest transgression, or simply for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, with the wrong color skin. In fact, one of the highest-profile lynchings to occur during this period, that of Sam Hose (a.k.a. Samuel Wilkes), occurred on April 23, 1899 in Newnan, Georgia only a few short months after Dr. Pope had been stationed nearby with the Third North Carolina Regiment. It is likely that the presence of black troops in the area contributed to the environment of extreme racial tension in which Hose's murder took place. Grace Elizabeth Hale counts Hose's lynching among what she identifies as an evolving phenomenon of "spectacle" lynchings becoming more common around the turn of the century. "…Something was new about lynchings in public," Hale writes, "attended by thousands, captured in papers…and photographed by those spectators who wanted a souvenir and yet failed to get a coveted finger, toe, or fragment of bone."[92] More and more, lynching was becoming part of the choreographed "performance" of power used to quell and even deny black progress. In turn, lynching photography and the dissemination of lynching photographs became a key act within the performance.

Portraits of black men like those in the Pope family collection served to challenge the image of the shamed, dominated, defeated, and emasculated black man propagated by

---

[92] Hale, 201-202.

lynching photography. In her study of the Negro photograph albums compiled by W.E.B.

Du Bois for the 1900 Paris Exhibition, Shawn Michelle Smith postulates:

> Produced within a year of the lynching of Samuel Wilkes, Du Bois' albums present the dignified equivalent of Samuel Wilkes, the images that white supremacists sought to efface with the spectacles of their dehumanized victims. Du Bois' portraits signify within and against the context of lynching, and specifically, within and against the context of lynching photographs…[93]

The portraits of finely-dressed, controlled, confident Black Best Men in the Pope

collection serve this same purpose, helping to visualize the kind of black man whose

existence lynching and lynching photography tried to deny. Smith also notes that

lynching photos and photo postcards were widely circulated and kept in private

collections, much as the Pope family photographs were saved and distributed, creating a

counter-effect. If, as Smith suggests, "…the photograph of a lynched black body

indicated the thoroughly embodied nature of white power," the photograph of an affluent,

respectable black man ultimately revealed the falsehood of black inferiority.[94]

In Manassa Pope's case, his professional status as a doctor put him in an

exceptional position both for his attainments and for the particular threat he posed to

white supremacy. Within the black community, doctors were considered to occupy the

highest echelons of status among the growing black professional classes of Raleigh and

---

[93] Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 117.

[94] Ibid., 139.

other Southern Cities.[95] Raleigh's Shaw University, a college for Negro men established in 1865, offered the first four-year medical program in the state, for blacks or whites. Dr. Pope was a member of the Leonard Medical School's first graduating class in 1886, and became the first black doctor to be licensed in North Carolina.

Among Dr. Pope's belongings was a copy of the Leonard School's 1886 class portrait (Fig. 16), depicting a extremely proud moment not just for Dr. Pope, but for the race in general. The backdrop selected for the portrait, an American flag, speaks volumes about its subjects' claims for legitimate citizenship, for true "American" status. At the 1886 graduation ceremony, senior Lawson Scruggs stated, "The colored man must go forward, he must harness himself for battle, and we who stand before you tonight, are pioneers of the medical profession of our race."[96] Manassa Pope, hearing those words, must surely have taken them to heart, and have felt a good deal of pride at his achievement—feelings which could be relived whenever he looked at his graduation portrait.

The portrait could also help him, as Scruggs' speech intimates, to "harness himself for battle" as he faced the difficulties of functioning as a black doctor in white supremacist society. Scholars have noted that black doctors represented an especial insult to whites, for trying to compete with whites professionally, and more generally for having stepped out of the place assigned to them by the dominant culture. Leon Litwack discusses the formidable odds faced by black doctors in practice, not only to combat

---

[95] Carter, 171.

[96] Lawson Andrew Scruggs, "Medical Education as a factor in the elevation of the colored race," *African Expositor* 9 (April 1886): 3.

Fig. 16. Graduation portrait, Shaw University Medical School, class of 1886.
Second row, far right, Dr. M.T. Pope.

white attempts to discredit them professionally, but to attract patients, black or white.[97]

Because he represented a particular threat to the viciously-guarded social order, Dr. Pope

and others like him would have been targets for particular hostility. Belongings like his

Shaw graduation portrait would thus have been especially important for helping to

support Dr. Pope, and for shoring him up to face the battles at hand.

       As more of North Carolina's African Americans became successful not only as

doctors but as business professionals and political leaders during the 1890s, these racial

battles became increasingly intense, and visual imagery took on a new dimension. The

1898 entrance of black soldiers from the Third North Carolina regiment, of which Dr.

Pope was a member, into the Spanish-American War coincided with the climax of the

Democratic Party's White Supremacy propaganda campaign. From August to November

of that year, inflammatory political cartoons by Norman Jennett appeared every few days

on the cover of Josephus Daniels' widely-circulated *News & Observer.* Historian Helen

---

[97] Litwack, 338-339. See also Gilmore, 21.

Edmonds writes of the challenge Democrats faced in convincing whites in the rural west

that "Negro domination" existed in the eastern part of the state. According to Edmonds,

Daniels sent out a hundred thousand copies of a supplement featuring Jennett's cartoons,

pictures of black officeholders, and accounts of black crime and violence, designed to

influence whites at the polls.[98]

Visual communication was key to the White Supremacy campaign, not only

because so many rural whites were illiterate, but because of its ability to convey complex

messages about power relationships in an easily understandable format. Some images

from the campaign relied on established stereotypes of the uncontrolled, infantile black

man needing to be guided and disciplined by whites. An example is one of Jennett's

August 1898 cartoons, depicting a stunned and moronic-looking black man, representing

"Negro rule," being beaten back by a ballot clasped in the fist of the "honest white man"

(Fig. 17). "A Warning," the caption reads, "Get Back! We Will Not Stand It." In images

like this one, the expected power structure is firmly in place, and the threat posed by

black political participation is one that can be easily swatted away.

As the November election approached, however, *News & Observer* imagery

turned the social hierarchy on its ear, along with nineteenth-century ideas about race and

manhood. Perhaps out of desperation to sway voters, many cartoons made use of skewed

proportion, in most cases to inspire terror in white hearts by portraying whites as victims

of black violence and domination. One of the most well-known and incendiary cartoons

from this period (Fig. 18) portrays the black man as a huge, evil, hairy, mythical beast

---

[98] Edmonds, 140-141.

Fig. 17. Cartoon from the August 30, 1898 *News & Observer.*

with a tail, wings, and enormous claws emerging from a "Fusion Ballot Box," about to

devour the tiny, hapless white people (including several women) in its path. "Negro

Rule" appears across the wings of the great beast, identified, as the caption reveals, as

"The Vampire That Hovers Over North Carolina."

Fig. 18. Cartoon from the September 27, 1898 *News & Observer.*

Another Jennett cartoon from October (Fig. 19) claims to represent "The New Slavery:" a

diminutive "Fusion Office Seeker" kneels at the feet of a gigantic black man with

exaggerated features, well-dressed, with a top hat and cane, smoking a cigar as big as the

white man's arm.

Fig. 19. Cartoon from the October 15, 1898 *News & Observer.*

As further incitement of the need for white supremacy, Jennett's imagery linked

public and civic authority for African American men with threats to the purity and safety

of white women. Several depict white women encountering black men in public spaces,

at the post office or in court; a more blatant example (Fig. 20) shows a white woman

representing eastern North Carolina cowering in fear, just beyond reach, behind a

barricade of letters which spell "Negro Rule." The cartoon in Fig. 21 depicts Dr. Pope's

close friend James H. Young, Colonel of the all-black Third North Carolina Regiment,

prominent black politician, and popular target for the White Supremacist media. Depicted

in his role as Director for the State School for the Blind, a puffed-up and lascivious-

looking Young "inspects the apartment" of a frightened woman, illustrating, as the

caption tells us, "the power conferred upon a negro politician in an institution in which most of the teachers and pupils are white ladies." In these images, it is the whites, not the blacks, who lack control. In the face of "Negro rule," these cartoons infer, white men will be politically impotent and unable to perform their masculine duty to protect white women; they will be, in essence, powerless. The message was clear: white supremacy must be restored and upheld, or the very fabric of Southern white manhood would be disastrously undermined.
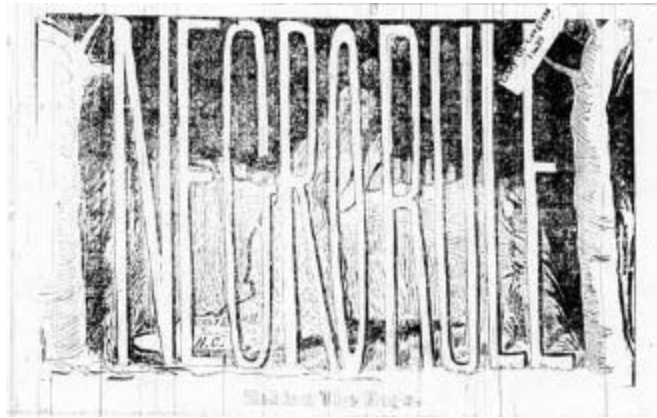

Fig. 20. Cartoon from the October 18, 1898 *News & Observer*.
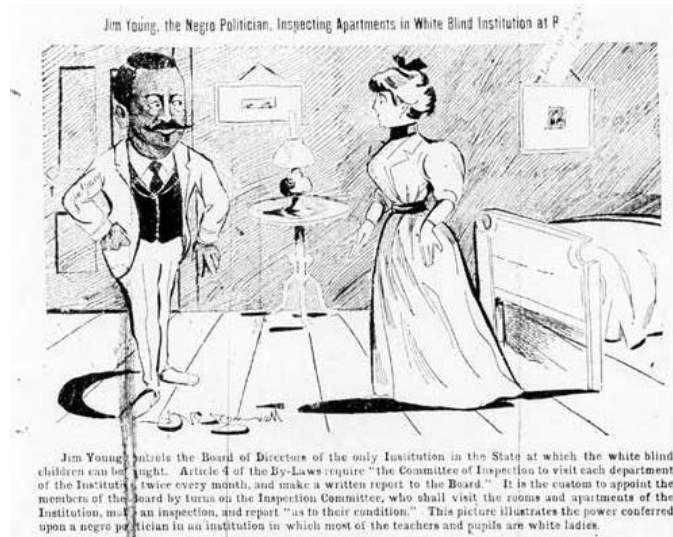
Fig. 21. Cartoon from the August 19, 1898 *News & Observer.*

The Spanish-American War, and the enlistment of the black Third North Carolina

Regiment, provided another forum for the use of imagery in conjunction with discussions

about masculinity. The Third Regiment was formed at the request of governor Daniel

Russell, under his primary adviser, James H. Young, and was only the second black

battalion in the country to be commanded by black officers. Though the Third was

mustered out in 1899 without having seen battle, their existence raised both the hopes of

the black community and enormous controversy. Glenda Gilmore and Kevin Gaines have

explored the impact of the Third Regiment's involvement on race relations. Gaines

writes, "The black soldier…was a controversial figure: to many whites, he threatened

assumptions of Anglo-Saxon manliness and dominance; to blacks, he was a glorious

example of African Americans' manhood, fitness for equality, and citizenship rights." [99]

---

[99] Gaines, 96.

Within the black community, the Spanish-American War was viewed as an opportunity to respond to racism by proving blacks' manliness, bravery, patriotism, and ability to participate as full citizens. Moreover, many blacks theorized that once the United States entered the fight for Cuban political liberation, it would become more difficult to deny black rights at home.

The hopes of Black Best Men were surely dampened by efforts on the part of Democrats to portray the black solider as unfit for service, or for citizenship. In *Gender and Jim Crow*, Gilmore devotes a chapter to racialized ideas of manhood in North Carolina during this period; she writes that "Whites infantilized the soldiers on the one hand and portrayed them as animals on the other. To invoke the trope of the African American as evolutionary child, whites argued that dressing up black men in uniforms only served to point up the absurdity of their manly posturing…"[100] A Jennett cartoon published in an October 1898 issue of the *News & Observer* illustrates this (Fig. 22): it depicts two caricatured black soldiers riding in a railroad car with white passengers, including a white woman who is clutching her skirts in horror. One of the soldiers has removed his boots and propped his bare feet on top of the seat in front of him, right in the face of an elderly male passenger. "What Occurred When Negro Troops Were Travelling [sic] on that Railroad Under Republican Management," the caption reads. In one fell swoop, this cartoon insults the integrity of black soldiers, implies their threat to white women, while making a case for, and offering the possibility of, racial segregation in public spaces.

---

[100] Gilmore, 81.
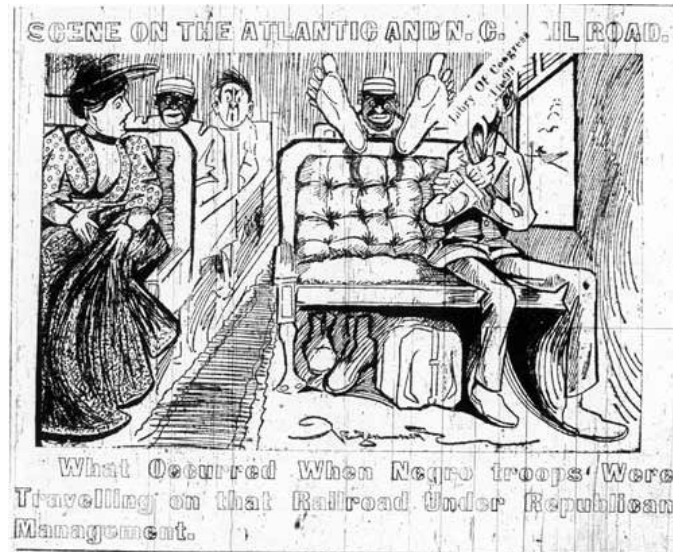
Fig. 22. Cartoon from the October 5, 1898 *News & Observer*.

Members of the Third Regiment and their supporters faced a difficult task in countering these slanderous representations, but it was a battle they took up with great enthusiasm. As Col. James H. Young was quoted in the *News & Observer* as saying, "I intend to fight them [the Democrats] until hell freezes over, and then fight on the ice."[101] Charles F. Meserve, president of Raleigh's Shaw University, Dr. Pope's alma mater, visited the Third Regiment while they were encamped near Macon. A quote from Meserve about the visit speaks to the pressure black soldiers were under to succeed; Meserve said that he "…Told them they were on trial, and the success or failure of the experiment must be determined by themselves alone; that godliness, moral character, prompt and implicit obedience, as well as bravery and unflinching courage, were

---

[101] *News & Observer*, July 17, 1898, 6.

necessary attributes of the true soldier."[102] Since the soldier was the ultimate, universal symbol of manliness, Black Best Men like James Young and Dr. Pope sought to insert themselves into this visualization. One of the ways they did so was by photographing themselves in the context of military service.

The Pope family photograph collection contains a series of rare portraits of the Third Regiment (see Figs. 23-25). These images represents an attempt to capture the black soldier in his full glory: smartly outfitted in uniform, weapons at sides, encamped, waiting, and ready for battle. One of these (Fig. 25) shows Dr. Pope, Col., James H. Young, and Marcus W. Alston, the Regiment's other assistant surgeon, posing in front of a tent at their encampment near Macon, Georgia in 1898 or 1899. The two surgeons are pictured with swords in one hand and medical bags in the other, affirming their capability not just to fight but also to perform higher-level medical tasks. Col. Young poses proudly, with a strong, steady, almost confrontational gaze at the camera. Young's demeanor of dignity control clearly posed an immense threat to the Democrats, since they often singled him out for caricature and described him as a leader "drunk with pomposity," who "defies everything and everybody."[103] All of the men in these military portraits appear fully aware of the expectations they carried, and fully prepared to meet them. Likewise, they seem to be striving for an air of authenticity, participating in the conventions of military portraiture to prove they were just as able as white men to fulfill the role of the soldier and of the officer.

---

[102] Edward A. Johnson, *History of the Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War* (Raleigh, NC: Capital Printing Co., 1899), 111.

[103] *News & Observer*, July 17, 1898, 6.

Figs. 23-24. Fig. 23: Third NC Regiment in Georgia, ca. 1899. *Left,* Lieut. D. J. Gilmer of Greensboro; *center*, Capt. S. O. Mast (?) of Wilson; *right*, Lieut. P. J. Haywood of Raleigh. Fig. 24: Unidentified soldiers of the Third NC Regiment in Georgia, ca. 1899.

Figure 25. Third NC Regiment in Georgia, ca. 1899. *Left*, Dr. Manassa T. Pope; *center*, Col. James H. Young; *right*, 1st Lieutenant Marcus W. Alston.

In the face of biased and untrue media accounts of their service, African

Americans also sought to control the legacy of the Third NC Regiment. An example of

how they did so can be found in a large souvenir poster published by Captain Thomas L.

Leatherwood of Asheville, NC, presumably available for purchase at the time of

publication, a copy of which is held in the Pope family collection.[104] The poster presents

sketches and short biographies of all of the officers of the Third Regiment.

Accompanying text, entitled "A New Epoch in Our History," reads in part:

> The record of the regiment will compare equal to any of the volunteer regiments
> that were in the service, and all newspaper criticisms, etc., were bias [sic] and
> unjust to the organization…The purpose of this souvenir is to show the eminent
> looking set of officers in a groupe [sic] and as much history as could possibly be
> printed hereon. All of the officers that we could get a photograph of, their
> sketches appear.

The Pope collection also includes a few of the original portraits from which the poster

sketches were made (see Fig. 26). This text confirms blacks' view of the necessity of

presenting the black officers as "eminent looking," and of documenting for posterity the

fact that the Third Regiment existed, contributed, and was maligned in print. Dr. Pope's

war portraits are part of this same effort. Words may have been manipulated by the

mainstream press to distort the situation, but pictures could not be denied.

Dr. Pope's Spanish-American War portraits represent a conscious effort to shape

the legacy of the Third Regiment and to correct the misrepresentations that were quickly

becoming part of the historical record. Rather than being "out of place," the portraits

seem to argue, black soldiers and officers in the Spanish-American War were exactly

where they belonged—defending their country, staking their claim to masculinity as valid

as any whites'. Any man who could nobly serve in the defense of his country deserved

the chance to participate fully in its governance, these black soldiers asserted, and any

---

[104] Captain Thomas L. Leatherwood, "A New Epoch in Our History" souvenir poster, Pope House Museum Foundation Collection.

Fig. 26. Unidentified officer from the Third NC Regiment.

country which fought for the independence of subjugated people could hardly deny

independence to its own. Unfortunately, given the successful outcome of the White

Supremacy campaign, larger social and political discussions drowned out the argument.

Perhaps the more immediate purpose for this collection of images at the time,

then, was for Dr. Pope's own self-visualization. Segregation, the constant threat of

violence against blacks for the slightest transgression against the racial code, and the

debate over citizenship rights all contributed to an environment of unrelenting tension in

which Dr. Pope would have felt personally under attack. Dr. Pope's photographs,

particularly the wartime portrait of him with his medical bag, would have served as

valuable personal reminders of his worth and calling in inevitable times of doubt. Since

the White Supremacy campaign purposefully brought the masculinity of black men into

question, objects that reminded them of their personal power would have been especially

valued. From a material culture standpoint, Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi writes, "From

earliest times people have taken pains to choose and own things that encapsulate their

personal power. For men this power tends to be synonymous with traditional virile

virtues such as strength and endurance."[105] Military service is the ultimate display of such

virile virtues; Dr. Pope's Spanish-American War photos were clearly objects of personal

power as well as support.

In the conflict over white supremacy that raged at the turn of the twentieth

century, images were weapons that were used by both sides, offensively and defensively.

Imagery was employed by the mainstream culture in a variety of complex ways to try,

sometimes in desperation, to maintain white dominance. Popular representations

presented and manipulated ideas about race and power with multilayered and often

contradictory messages. Images in advertising, film, cartoons, and other print media told

the general public that African-American men were both ineffectual and dangerous at the

same time. Either the black man was helpless, defeated, and impotent, too immature and

incompetent to handle the demands of citizenship—less than a man, in other words—or

he was manhood run rampant, overtly sexual, boastful, intoxicated with power, and a

threat to white jobs and female purity. White supremacists used whichever message, or

any combination of them, that suited a given context to suggest that under no

circumstances should black men be allowed out of the subservient and inferior "place" in

which whites aimed to confine them.

In reality, on the opposing side of the conflict, better-class African American men

like Dr. Manassa Pope were already breaking out of that place, disproving the deceit of

white supremacy, and attempting to encourage lower-class blacks to break out along with

---

[105] Csikszentmihalyi, 23.

them. "In the process of defining oneself as masculine," Martin Summers writes, "individuals within specific historical contexts use identifiable characteristics against which to construct their manhood."[106] If Black Best Men were to encourage black progress, they rationalized, they would have to buy into and define themselves against mainstream ideas about what it meant to be a man. Photography, especially in the highly-controlled environment of the portrait studio, was an accessible and powerful means by which Black Best Men could embody white ideas of manliness, necessary to assure their spot at the top of the black power structure.

The Pope family portraits of Best Men were about fulfilling the role of race representative, but they were also about creating distance between themselves and the black lower classes in the eyes of the dominant culture, proving that some black men did not conform to stereotypes of inferiority. While this may be interpreted as an attempt on the part of black Best Men to "be white," their ultimate goal was to normalize the idea of the successful, respectable black man, to support the creation of an social environment in which anyone could achieve similar status.

Dr. Pope's portraits served private purposes independent of white admonishments or expectations, but still part of larger political discourses. Taking and collecting photographs was one of the everyday methods by which black men created and expressed their unique gender identities, while salvaging a sense of individual authority denied them by white supremacy. Under the oppressive and often violent culture of segregation, photographs as possessions likely would have served valuable functions for their owners

---

[106] Summers, 111.

as reminders of self-worth, fraternity, and achievement. The personal meanings of photos had public and even political implications, however, in that they were part of the arsenal of defense each black man had to accumulate in order to survive the everyday indignities of Jim Crow. Photographs were a piece of the effort on the part of Dr. Pope and other black men, as Lawson Scruggs said at the 1886 Shaw graduation, to "harness themselves" for the "battles" they faced daily as blacks in white-supremacist society.

If images were part of these small-scale contemporary battles, they were also part of the larger war over the visualizations of black men that would be preserved and remembered in the long term. Dr. Pope's photographs of Black Best Men, of doctors, professionals, and soldiers are evidence of black capability, confidence, self-possession, agency, and achievement that turn-of-the-century creators of white supremacist popular culture wanted to pretend did not exist. By taking and keeping these portraits, African-American men actively reshaped their own legacy, proving that they were more than projections of the ignorant Sambo, grinning minstrel, insidious chicken thief, black beast, or thoroughly dehumanized lynching victim. In turn, their photographs prove to be objects with power not just to attack and defend, but to revise historical memory.

CHAPTER IV

OBJECTS OF MEMORY

To be a woman in such an age carries with it a privilege and an opportunity never implied before. But to be a woman of the Negro race in America, and to be able to grasp the deep significance of the possibilities of the crisis, is to have a heritage, it seems to me, unique in the ages…What a responsibility then to have the sole management of the primal lights and shadows. Such is the colored woman's office. She must stamp weal or woe on the coming history of this people. May she see her opportunity and vindicate her high prerogative.

--Anna Julia Haywood Cooper, 1892[107]
(member of the same Raleigh, NC Haywood family as Mrs. Delia Haywood Pope)

The late-nineteenth to early-twentieth-century history of Southern black women is often put in terms of the uniquely heavy burden they carried as a result of being both African American and female, at a time when members of their race and their gender faced discrimination and major barriers to full public and civic participation. Despite their oppressive past and the hardships black women faced at the turn of the century, however, many saw a uniquely advantageous position from which to act to help ensure a better future for their race.

Black female leaders like Anna Julia Cooper, Mary Church Terrell, and Nannie Helen Burroughs espoused a philosophy of racial uplift by which women who had access to the necessary resources should seek to develop themselves individually, with the larger

---

[107] Cooper, Anna Julia, *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South* (Xenia, Ohio: Aldine Publishing, 1892), 144-145.

goal of improving conditions for their race as a whole.[108] By acquiring education, wealth, and social standing, and by conforming to standards of cleanliness, chastity, thrift, dignity, and industriousness, these women believed, individuals could positively impact not just their own lives, but also the prospects and position of their lower-class counterparts.[109] Prominent, "better class" black women made their work manifest through an explosion of women's clubs beginning in the 1890s and the pioneering of educational and religious institutions; the popular club slogan "lifting as we climb" symbolized their perceived mission not just to shoulder their own burdens, but to shepherd the ascent of women in lower positions on the social and economic ladder.

As better-class females seized increasingly powerful and public roles in uplift organizations, they recognized the need to emphasize their commitment to domestic and familial responsibilities. African Americans understood the power of the popular Victorian image of womanhood—known as the cult of True Womanhood, or the cult of domesticity—that had taken hold among whites during the nineteenth century, which dictated the home as the woman's sphere, distinctly separate from the male sphere of public activity. The black "better class" shrewdly put the cult of domesticity to use in support of their cause. Emphasizing that the black woman's key responsibilities were domestic, African American female leaders portrayed the home as a base for agitation for racial improvement, claiming that "The Negro woman is rightly making her first effort

---

[108] Higginbotham, 14-15.

[109] Stephanie J. Shaw, in her book *What a Woman Ought to Be and To Do*, coins the term "socially responsible individualism" to describe this ideal of high individual achievement combined with obligation to others who were less fortunate.

for purity and truth at her own fireside."[110] Since, according to white bourgeois ideals, the

home was the critical site where upright values were formed and imparted, black mothers

had ultimate responsibility for and control over the future of their race. Keeping the

home, or at least the image of home, to a certain standard was an essential measurement

of racial capability. Family life and appearance thus took on an importance well beyond

the domestic unit.[111]

Better-class black women throughout the South, like Mrs. Delia Haywood Pope,

shouldered their burdens and responsibilities with great resolve and the understanding

that the family was "the strongest institutional weapon of survival in African American

culture and society."[112] They improved themselves through education and other training,

helped those facing hardship in their communities, participated in community and

religious organizations, and did their utmost to maintain and impart an image of well-

kept, suitable, and dignified homes and children. Fully aware of the public significance

their actions and examples carried, black women's domestic and community involvement

were part of an active political effort on their part to control individual appearances in

such a way as to disprove wider racist stereotypes, while setting, in their own minds at

least, an "uplifting" example for the less fortunate of their race and gender.

---

[110] Hunton, 282.

[111] See Gilmore's *Gender and Jim Crow* and Higginbotham's *Righteous Discontent*, among other sources, for similar arguments about black women operating politically within the private sphere.

[112] Darlene Clark Hine, "Introduction," *The Face of Our Past: Images of Black Women from Colonial America to the Present,* Kathleen Thompson and Hilary Mac Austin, eds. (Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999), xi.

On top of African American women's responsibility for charting the future of their race, they also typically maintained the material records of its past, such as family heirlooms, papers, and photographs. While the role of "family archivist" is normally filled by a female, for black women during the Jim Crow period, their positions as family and race historians took on increased significance. Having often been denied the rights of family under slavery, cultivating and maintaining ties of kinship became crucial to the survival and progression of the race in post-slavery times.[113] Black women, as nurturers of the home and family, took responsibility for tracing family values backward into the past, as well as transmitting them to future generations.

Family photographs, both as objects of the domestic realm and as a means of image-making, were one of the components African American women like Delia Pope used to assemble and make apparent individual and family history, identity, reputation, and legacy, in support of the larger mission of racial improvement. Since women exercised authority over the home—its contents, décor, and overall appearance—family portraits fell within the realm of their control. In the case of the Pope family collection, the photographs' inscriptions and their image content strongly suggest that Delia Pope was its primary caretaker, and that her daughters took on this role after her death. Most photographs in the collection have to do with Ruth, Evelyn, or Delia and her siblings; a proportionately small number relate directly to Dr. Pope or his descendents. This chapter will add another dimension to the meaning and significance of the Pope family portraits

---

[113] Ibid., xi.

by emphasizing their role as objects of memory, a function frequently cultivated by women, who exercised primary control over their production, collection, and display.

In their roles as both the archivists and architects of their race, black women like Delia Pope used photographs to construct an "image" that could serve three simultaneous purposes: as active opposition to white supremacy; as part of their campaign for racial improvement; and as personal affirmation for themselves and their families. All three functions of the photographs represent an active effort by African American women to determine how African Americans, at the individual and at the group level, would be remembered. All three, in addition, evidence political thought and action by black women during the Jim Crow period, further blurring the lines that separate "public" and "private" in black women's lives. As rulers of the domestic realm, women exhibited political consciousness and agency when they used photographs to produce and mold individual, racial, and gender identity. Just as domesticity infiltrated black leaders' public rhetoric, politics permeated the home, in that the creation, display, distribution, and compilation of family photographs were in themselves political acts.

It seems appropriate to begin with one of the most striking images from the Pope collection, one which powerfully exemplifies all of the above functions. The photograph is a group portrait, taken probably within the first decade of the twentieth century (see Figure 27), portraying eleven black women, one of which is Delia Pope (middle, back row), and at least two others of which are Delia's sisters (including prominent North Carolina educator Mary E. Phillips, middle row, center). Delia and Mary were both schoolteachers at one point, so it seems likely that many if not all of the women in this

portrait were professional educators. The women are presented in a variety of postures, looking off in different directions. All are dressed quite formally in clothing, jewelry, and hairstyles typical of the fashion of the period for the more well-off. All are wearing serious, knowing expressions, some more stern than others. Several of the women are holding books; one has hers open in her lap; and another displays a cross prominently on her chest. Multiple copies of this picture were framed and at least one displayed in the Pope house, indicating its particular significance.

This portrait gives the impression of being very deliberately posed to send a message of defiance, and of unity and diversity at the same time. On the one hand, the image offers a powerful counter to stereotypical images of black women common to the period, drawn largely from the "mammy" and "jezebel" stock categories, which tended to

Figure 27. Delia Pope, Mary E. Phillips, and others, ca. 1900.
Back row, center, Delia Pope; *middle row, center,* Mary. E. Phillips.

portray them either as selfless servants or as sexually loose.[114] The young women in this portrait are presenting the facts quite clearly, flaunting not their sexuality but their intellectual ability, faithfulness, independence, self-confidence, and status as owners of fine clothing and jewelry. This portrait projects a message about the true nature of black womanhood that stands in stark contrast to white supremacist stereotypical representations, and reflects these women's active efforts to shape the ways in which they would be remembered by history.

One of the ways this and other portraits of women in the Pope collection help to define black femininity is by offering an image of African American physical beauty. There is substantial evidence of black better-class preoccupation with appearance and beauty culture, important not just as a means of gaining social esteem, but as a means of racial uplift: historian Wilmoth Carter writes in reference to Raleigh, "…the philosophy behind the maintenance of an acceptable personal appearance has broadened the occupational horizon and aided the establishment of businesses through which Negroes believe a rising status can be effected for the race as a whole."[115] Delia Pope herself participated in this professionalization when she became a sales representative for Madame C. J. Walker, a prominent businesswoman known for her patented method of smoothing and straightening African American women's hair. In this role, she could not only realize standards of beauty and improved self-image for herself and her daughters, but help other women to achieve them.

---

[114] See Harris 90-101 for a discussion of the "mammy" and "jezebel" stereotypes as seen through popular imagery.

[115] Carter, 227-228.

These attempts were partly in opposition to representations such as the advertisement shown in Figure 28, which in one frame depicts a seemingly attractive and well-appointed woman from behind, then reveals her supposedly unpleasant (and African American) facial features in the second frame. The message of the "Beauty on the Street"
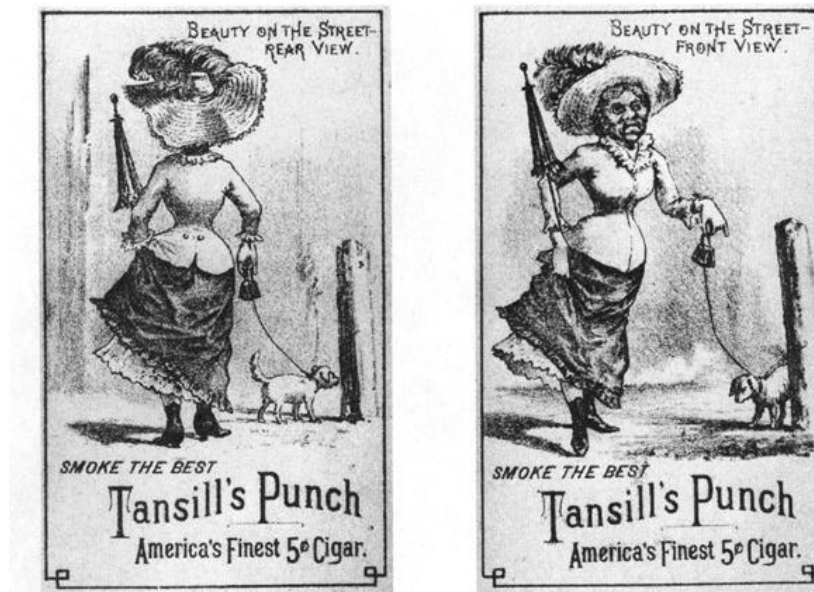
Fig. 28. "Beauty on the Street" trade card advertisement, ca. 1900.[116]

trade card is that no matter how well blacks "copied" middle-class whites in dress and physical appearance would always give them away—an implication loaded with particular irony given the ability of many African Americans to "pass" for white. In the second frame of the ad we see that the woman pictured is rudely allowing her dog to urinate on the street, and is also rather flagrantly holding up her skirts to reveal her ankles, a display considered unladylike at the time and probably meant to signify the

---

[116] Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center, National Museum of American History, Smithsonian Institution.

woman's sexual availability. Further, her facial features offer an example of how black women were frequently masculinized in popular imagery, thus denying them access to the white definition of Southern feminine beauty. The "Beauty on the Street" trade card is a complex and multilayered example of the types of messages popular imagery sent about black femininity, in particular with regard to middle-class black women.

African Americans responded to imagery such as this by seeking to envision their own, distinct brand of womanly attractiveness. The Pope portraits, as seen in Figure 27, represent an attempt to visualize a type of beauty linked with independence, respectability, intelligence, and proper training, exemplified in a 1904 article in the *Voice of the Negro* entitled "Rough Sketches: A Study of the Features of the New Negro Woman." The article declares black women's beauty preferable to white women's because it had "meaning," and was "real, pure, substantial…with a life, a soul." It features images of women with captions like: "This beautiful eyed girl is the result of careful home training and steady schooling. There is an unusual promise of intelligence and character rising out of her strong individuality."[117] Beauty that is solely based on physical appearance was too closely related to sexuality and licentiousness, commonly-stereotyped characteristics better-class black women desired to suppress. The women in the Pope portrait in Figure 27 possess beauty, but rather than being of a purely physical nature, it is ideological, visually constructed using props like clothing, jewelry, and books to convey elements of purity, morality, education, and character.

---

[117] John H. Adams, Jr., "Rough Sketches: A Study of the Features of the Negro Woman," *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 8 (August 1904), 324.

Perhaps a less obvious message conveyed by the photograph in Figure 27 is the idea of variation and segmentation within the black community. Alain Locke was one of many to argue that an important part of the New Negro ideology was challenging the popular idea of the black community as monolithic—highlighting increasing segmentation, especially by class, as evidence of the impossibility of viewing or treating all blacks en masse.[118] The variety of poses, the different facial expressions and unconventional angles of the subjects' gazes, the mixture of dark and light clothing, and the range of skin tones presented in this image could be interpreted as just such a challenge, visually reminding the viewer that this group is in fact made up of unique individuals. The diverse appearance of the women in this portrait may have been intended as a challenge to assumptions inherent to segregation that all blacks were alike, and thus deserved the same limited rights and opportunities.

The portrait points out the complexity, and even contradiction, inherent to uplift ideology and the "politics of respectability" espoused by elite black women. In one sense, this bold portrait was meant to envision the best sort of African American woman, offering proof of the high levels of achievement of which the race was capable, and setting an example to which less fortunate females could aspire. In seeking to serve as their race's representatives, however, elite blacks also needed to distinguish themselves from their lower-class counterparts. By claiming that female attractiveness was in large part a result of proper training, for example, the better class implied that women without opportunity for such training could not hope to achieve "true" beauty. Thus, portraits

---

[118] Locke, 5. See also Higginbotham, 191-192.

such as that in Figure 27 can also embody divisions within the black community and the political complications of uplift ideology, which celebrated the potential for racial improvement while tacitly condemning the lower classes for failing to meet the prevailing definition of respectability.

On an individual level, it is likely that this portrait was significant to Delia not only because of what it said about elite blacks, but for what it told her about herself specifically—that she was well-appointed, capable, dignified, and attractive, but also that she was a member of this community of brave and powerful women on whom she could rely for support. The portrait visualizes the newfound sense of collective pride, strength, and determination black women were developing as a result of their involvement in the public sphere.[119] In this way, the positive personal reinforcement that photographs provided had profound political significance; portraits helped to affirm African American women's faith in and commitment to larger struggles to improve conditions for themselves, their families, and their race, and to oppose white supremacy.

One of the primary areas of African American family life which came under attack by white supremacists, and therefore one of the most important areas in which blacks felt the need to prove themselves, was child-rearing—especially the average black woman's ability to do so effectively. As elite blacks sought to celebrate the abilities of the black wife and mother, the white establishment, threatened by black progress, sought equally to tear her down. Frequent descriptions in white publications portrayed the black mother as lazy, unclean, and domestically incompetent. Opinions expressed in 1901 by

---

[119] Higginbotham, 18.

William Hannibal Thomas, a well-known mulatto teacher frequently cited by white

supremacists, serve as an example:

> Negro women are…weak in purpose, timid in execution, superstitious in thought, lascivious in conduct, and signally lacking in morality, thrift, and industry… Negro motherhood is not animated with…convictions of truth and duty… freedwomen…bring to the discharge of their domestic duties illiterate minds, unskilled hands, impetuous tempers, untidy deportment, and shiftless methods.[120]

Prominent whites spoke of black women's impurity and inability to control their primal

urges as the chief causes of corrupted home life; since black women were responsible for

upholding and imparting morality to their offspring, some early twentieth-century whites

reasoned, the black race was doomed.[121]

Such portrayals were deeply incongruous with what was probably the most

popular African American stereotypical figure during this period, the "mammy." Dating

from slavery times, during which black women were frequently given primary

responsibility for the care of white children, the mammy figure was both disciplinarian

and nurturer, in many ways the ideal of competent child-rearing. The image in Figure

29—the cover of sheet music from the popular genre of "coon songs"—shows a typical

mammy, with exaggerated and somewhat masculine features, wearing the customary

---

[120] William Hannibal Thomas, *The American Negro: What He Was, What He Is, and What He May Become* (New York: MacMillan, 1901), 184-189.

[121] Anne Stavney, "'Mothers of Tomorrow': The New Negro Renaissance and the Politics of Maternal Representation," *African American Review* 32, No. 4 (Winter 1998), 535.

Figure 29. Cover of sheet music for "Go To Sleep My Little Pickaninny,"
by J. A. Le Barge and Fred Heltman, 1915. [122]

head-kerchief popularized by the advertising icon, Aunt Jemima. In this image the

mammy cradles an African American baby, or "kinky-haired pickaninny," as described in

the song lyrics, comforting him or her with what is noted as a distinctly "*Southern*

lullaby." This image of black motherhood was one that whites found comforting, in part

because it recalled the "good old days" of Southern life, when African Americans "knew

their place" under slavery.[123] Marilyn Kern-Foxworth has also proposed that the

attractiveness of such images to whites had to do with the consistent "jolliness" of the

mammy figure, suggesting black women's contentment with a servile existence.[124]

---

[122] J. A. Le Barge and Fred Heltman, "Go To Sleep My Little Pickaninny." 1915. Historic Sheet Music Collection, Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/sheetmusic/> (accessed 21 December 2005).

[123] See Hale's *Making Whiteness*, 98-119, for an insightful discussion of the mammy figure in the Southern white mind.

[124] Kern-Foxworth, 87.

Mammy iconography such as that shown in Figure 28 thus had the power to encourage and reinforce the social structure white supremacists were struggling to maintain in the early twentieth century.

To better-class blacks, who despised the "coon song" phenomenon, the mammy figure was indeed a remnant of the past, and one best left there. The Pope portraits offer visions of black mothers and children that not only distinctly contradict racist portrayals, but reflect the great aspirations African Americans held for the future of their families and their race, in spite of white predictions and condemnations. The Pope collection contains several studio portraits depicting black mothers posing with their children, as exemplified by the images in Figures 30-32. These three portraits offer visions of capable, confident, upstanding, well-heeled African American mothers, contradicting white supremacist depictions of both the "jezebel" and the "mammy"—part of an effort, in Anne Stavney's words, to "reclaim and desexualize the black female body while also rebutting the corresponding racist iconography of the sexless, nurturing black mother, the black mammy."[125] Unlike the mythical mammy, these were true-to-life black mothers, dignified, serious, capable, and yet still young, dynamic, attractive, and real.

---

[125] Stavney, 538.

Figures 30-32. Fig. 30: Unidentified portrait from the Pope collection, ca. 1900s.
Fig. 31: Unidentified portrait, probably Delia's sister with children, ca. 1900s.
Fig. 32: Emma Satterwhite, wife of Rev. Satterwhite, and baby, Raleigh, NC, ca. 1915.

Taken together, these three portraits illustrate how the Pope photographs served political ends, both as constructed statements about black motherhood and as objects of personal, emotional expression and reinforcement. Lined up in this manner, the three portraits show a kind of progression. Although probably also a chronological series—Figure 32 dates later than Figures 30-31, at least—the other difference visible is in the level of naturalness and intimacy conveyed by the subjects. While the image in Figure 30 depicts serious subjects and is somewhat awkwardly composed, with both baby and backdrop elaborately decorated, Figure 31 is softer, more intimate, and more casual; Figure 32 goes further, foregoing a background altogether, focusing simply but powerfully on the tenderness and closeness between mother and child. While the image in Figure 30 is perhaps less expressive than the others, its unidentified adult subject would almost certainly have viewed this image as representative of her relationship with and hopes for her child, supporting her own sense of her capabilities as a mother. At the

same time, Emma Satterwhite, the woman in Figure 32, was probably not unaware of the larger message her portrait conveyed, that African Americans possessed maternal instincts just as strong as whites.'

The images of mothers and children in the Pope collection contribute to the cause of racial improvement, helping to envision and set an example of the proper and upstanding African American family. Kevin Gaines deals with the model of the Victorian family as central to the uplift ideology promoted by the black better class: "What made uplift compelling for many African Americans was its vision of black freedom and security in the image of the home and the patriarchal family," writes Gaines. "As political options were foreclosed, the home and family remained as the crucial site of race building."[126] These portraits were part of the ongoing efforts of the black "better class" to establish an image of capability and social and domestic appropriateness; though likely never seen by the Popes' lower-class black counterparts, the photographs helped to inculcate such values among the better class, which could then be transferred to their interactions with the less fortunate.

For better-class black parents like the Popes, a crucial part of constructing and maintaining the proper image lay in carefully controlling the public appearance and behavior of their children. In an autobiographical paper written by Ruth Pope in June, 1939, for an education class at Columbia University, Ruth writes of how her parents maintained strict policies regarding her and Evelyn's public demeanor during childhood:

---

[126] Gaines, 12.

We were taught never to wear each other's clothes, to play with our own toys, never to eat between meals and never to eat away from home. To ask for water away from home was a crime, and to chew gum in presence of adult visitors likewise punishable….my mother and father would tell me, 'pretty is as pretty does,' and insisted that we were both pretty only when we were good.[127]

Clearly, to Delia and Manassa Pope and others like them, the ways their children were viewed was an important part of "packaging" themselves as dignified, successful, and worthy of elevated social status. The very telling dictate that "pretty is as pretty does" also ties back into notions of feminine beauty discussed previously; the Popes wanted their daughters to see themselves and to be seen as beautiful, but understood that there was more to beauty than physical qualities alone.

Child portraits in the Pope collection operate powerfully both as objects of resistance and of collective and personal memory, symbolizing hopes for the future of the race in general as well as for its individual children. Studio portraits of children represent a sizeable subset of the collection and display a remarkable consistency (see Figures 33 and 34 for examples). Child subjects are almost invariably dressed in white—perhaps to convey purity, cleanliness, and propriety—and are formally posed, wearing serious, adult-like expressions, sometimes participating in adult activities. Visual culture scholar Shawn Michele Smith has argued that at the beginning of the twentieth century, photographing children was an activity essential to the social replication of the white middle-class family.[128] Black families seem to have seized onto this idea; taking,

---

[127] Ruth Pope, "My Autobiography," Pope Family Papers #5085 (Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill), 6.

[128] Smith, *American Archives*, 120.

94

displaying, and distributing portraits of children was part of middle-class life, and another method of portraying themselves as deserving of other benefits status had to offer.[129]

Figures 33-34. Fig. 33: Ruth and Evelyn Pope at home, ca. 1912. *Left,* Ruth Pope; *right,* Evelyn Pope. Fig. 34: Unidentified portrait taken in Norfolk, VA, ca. 1900s.

Another possible motive for black emphasis on photographing children has to do with struggles for political power. Janette Greenwood, in her study of Charlotte's "better class" during this period, notes that in the face of the harsh realities of Jim Crow, some of Delia and Manassa Pope's peers began shifting their emphasis on political rights for the next generation instead of their own; the numerous child portraits in the Pope collection are at least somewhat representative of this transfer of hope from one generation to the

---

[129] See Stavney 540-543 for discussion of child photos in the *Crisis* and how they represent a strategy for obtaining political power, and resisting and withstanding racial discrimination.

next.[130] For instance, the unidentified boy depicted in Figure 34 has been posed as if at a desk in a schoolroom, attentively and eagerly studying his lessons, indicating his preparation for a promising future. By assigning their children qualities of maturity, poise, and intellectual capability in portraits, better-class black parents implied the readiness of their children to take up the political cause, and to carry it further than previous generations had been able.

A portrait of Ruth and Evelyn Pope from about 1912 exemplifies all of these ideas (see Figure 33). In this portrait, Ruth (standing) and Evelyn (sitting), clutching their dolls, are dressed quite properly and nearly identically, down to their hair ribbons and the lockets around their necks. In setting up this portrait, it is clear that every effort has been made to confer onto Ruth and Evelyn an image of compliance, solemnity, maturity, purity, dignity, and success. They seem to have even been dressed to match their dolls, which have white complexions—potentially an attempt to visually connect the girls with symbols of "proper" Victorian-era womanhood. The furniture confirms that this picture was taken at the Pope house; the same settee still sits in the front hall. A backdrop has been erected, the edges of which are visible, indicating the work of a trained photographer. Indeed, in Ruth's autobiographical paper for her Columbia University assignment, she makes an intriguing reference. She mentions that prior to reaching about four years old,

> I had cried when pictures were being made of us until no good one of me is available. The director of the kindergarten promised if I'd allow him to take my

---

[130] Greenwood, 225.

picture I might come to his school which was next door. This I did for three reasons: I was afraid of him, he talked so loudly and I wanted to go to school. [131]

Based on Ruth's age, it is at least possible that this is the very portrait that resulted from the sitting with the kindergarten director. This quotation further reveals better-class blacks' priorities and expectations—not only Ruth's own excitement over going to school, but also how important it was to the adults that they have a good, proper portrait of her.

Child portraits such as this one of Ruth and Evelyn are representative of their parents' hopes not just for the next generation, but for the memories and legacy their family would leave behind. Patricia Holland's statement that "Making and preserving a family snapshot is an act of faith in the future" may be particularly true for members of the black better class during the Jim Crow era, whose prime motivation was to counter claims made about them by the dominant society. [132] If their true nature and abilities were not to be widely recognized in the present, many African Americans hoped, these qualities would someday be appreciated in the future. Photographs were incontestable, the "counterarchive" that would be handed down through the generations to disprove racist myths created by other types of documentation. This portrait of Ruth and Evelyn, then, represents not just what their parents wanted them to be at the time; not just their hopes for what Ruth and Evelyn would become and achieve; but how the Popes aspired to leave their mark on the world, after they had all passed out of it.

---

[131] Pope, 8.

[132] Holland, 1.

If the Popes' photographs represent their faith in the promise of what was to come, they also symbolize the importance of memory, of valued connections to the past. As previously discussed, African American women like Delia, Ruth, and Evelyn Pope bore the primary responsibility for maintaining historical and kinship links. We can find evidence of this in their photographs through the collection, display, and modification of the portraits of ancestors—for example, the large-format reproductions which hung in the Popes' living room (as discussed in Chapter 2), and a pair of early tintypes which were later reproduced in a variety of formats and hand-colored. But perhaps more interesting are those few portraits of women themselves that imply ancestral and historical associations, examples of which are provided in Figures 35 and 36.

Figure 35 is a striking and very well preserved formal portrait of Delia Pope, taken at a Raleigh portrait studio in about 1905, shortly after the death of her father. Of particular interest in this portrait is the pin she wears at her neck, which is still present in the Pope house collection. The pin is in the shape of a wreath of black leaves, a common motif in Victorian mourning jewelry. It is likely that Delia had this portrait made specifically for the purpose of capturing the mourning process for her father's loss; the pin symbolizes her personal connections to him and her commitment to honoring his memory. Delia has in this case subtly manipulated the photograph's content to serve a memorial purpose.

Figures 35-36. Figure 35: Delia Haywood Pope, ca. 1905.
Fig. 36: Unidentified portrait, probably Delia's sister, ca. 1890s.

On a broader scale, this portrait of Delia represents yet another attempt to imply

middle-class respectability. Victorian mourning rituals, at their peak in America during

the mid-nineteenth century, remained at the turn of the twentieth century a way to express

bourgeois status; fashionable mourning attire and accessories was one way for women to

display their wealth and decorum. The so-called "cult of mourning" dictated proper

techniques and public acts that must be performed in keeping with gentile standards.[133]

By having this portrait made while wearing her mourning pin, Delia documented her

proper participation in such rituals, thus asserting her family's dignity and status. It may

also represent a gesture on Delia's part to honor the traditions of her parents, who were

adults at the time when mourning rituals would have been more strictly followed.

---

[133] See Karen Halttunen, *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982), 124-152 for an extended discussion of middle-class mourning rituals.

The mourning image in Figure 36, although similarly referencing links to the past, is even more complex. The subject of the image is most likely one of Delia's sisters. In this unusual and somewhat unsettling image, taken outside in an unknown location, she appears in mourning garb, holding a white handkerchief, gazing sadly somewhat longingly into the distance. The inscription on the back of the image is ambiguous: "Have you ever seen her before? I hope this will help keep the flies away. For J. E. P." These initials almost certainly stand for Jonas Elias Pope, Delia's father-in-law, Manassa Pope's father. Since his year of death is not known, however, it cannot be firmly deduced whether the portrait was sent by this woman to Jonas on the occasion of another death, or sent to Delia and Manassa on the occasion of Jonas' death. The latter scenario seems more likely.

As for the rest of this inscription, it probably refers to the subject's cognizance of the formally posed and constructed nature of the portrait; she infers a difficulty recognizing herself as depicted here. Her comment about "keeping flies away" is at first startling, considering the association to death, but the more probable implication is a somewhat humorous and dismissive one—that the photograph itself could be used to shoo away insects. In this way, she acknowledges that the image presented here is unnatural, an almost required exercise in propriety, as was sending the portrait to her sister on the occasion the death of her father-in-law. As this particular portrait suggests, these women clearly understood the importance of creating and maintaining the proper image, and were fully conscious of their acts of creation.

Delia Pope and other "better-class" African American women like her understood and used photographs as objects of memory, with the power to document and control the representation of not only their own families, but their race, class, and gender. Appreciating the Pope portraits as objects of memory requires viewing them simultaneously as calculated, constructed visual images, and as physical things. In their role as images, the photographs operated against common white supremacist representations of blacks as a primitive, incompetent, doomed people by visualizing their best abilities, their potential, and their bright hopes for the future. They offer specific refutation of racist ideas about African American femininity, beauty, and child-rearing. The portraits also fit within a visual culture of racial uplift, capturing and presenting an idealized, bourgeois state of domesticity to which, according to the better class, all turn-of-the-century blacks could and should aspire. But the Pope portraits were also material objects, belongings that were kept, held, admired, displayed, distributed, and passed from one generation to the next— actions for which women took primary responsibility. These physical acts encouraged positive feelings of self-image and community that women carried with them in their public dealings.

Despite a lack of opportunity to participate in formal political processes, concern for the status and future of their race permeated every aspect of African American women's lives. Just as the well-kept, proper black home was held up by race leaders as a symbol of progress and capability, a sort of proving ground for racial development, family portraits like the Popes' made statements that spread well outside the domestic arena. Through the image of the individual, the portraits comment on African Americans

as a group. As those who exercised foremost control over their collection, black women therefore took on a much larger political role in helping to define how their race would be represented, in both the present and future.

Women like Delia Pope did not experience their race and their womanhood separately. Womanly duties of care, nurture, and maintenance of kinship and family—of creating a healthy, safe, and encouraging space in which children could learn to value themselves—were private as well as public responsibilities, helping to ensure the survival and development of individual families, communities, and the race as a whole. Producing, collecting, and displaying family photographs allowed black women to envision not just their potential as individuals, but their roles as conduits for memory, for upstanding values and respectability passed through generations. As visualized in the Pope family portraits, African American womanhood is not a load to be carried, but an entitlement, an opportunity, and a reason to hope.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSIONS

All colonized and subjugated people who, by way of resistance, create an oppositional subculture within the framework of domination, recognize that the field of representation (how we see ourselves, how others see us) is a site of ongoing struggle.[134]

-bell hooks

This thesis has explored the significance of family photography for African Americans in the Jim Crow South, arguing that it represents a crucial, yet under-examined, arena for identity construction and the expression of political agency. In virtually everything they did, the Popes concerned themselves primarily with portraying an image of success, intellect, capability, dignity, and respectability. All of these were considered qualities desirable for the level of citizenship and social standing blacks felt they deserved. Photography was a key venue for the production and replication of this image, especially useful for the self-described "better class," who came under particular assault during the Jim Crow period due to their visibility and the threat they posed to the social order. Portraiture offered an opportunity to represent themselves as they wanted to be seen, and to forcefully contradict the racist images of blacks circulating in popular media and consciousness.

---

[134] hooks, 46.

At the same time, the personal functions of family photographs—as reminders of the past, sources of affirmation in the present, and projections of the future—were magnified and complicated for families like the Popes whose claims to that past, present, and future, because of their race, were constantly challenged. The benefits that portraits afforded on the domestic level thus carried political weight, instilling constructive values and positive reinforcement that assisted blacks in their larger struggles to improve conditions both for themselves and for their race.

Although historical analysis often separates them, Southern blacks like the Popes did not experience their race, gender, class, regional or national associations independently. Their photographs represented an arena wherein those aspects of individuality could be claimed and communicated simultaneously. Higginbotham writes that African American respectability signified their hopes for "common ground—to be both black and American…as the nation worked to deny the possibility by isolating the 'Negro's place' within physical and symbolic spaces of inferiority."[135] The Popes' position "out of place" was in fact a very unstable one; their personal value and abilities were always questioned, and they held a precarious social position which the dominant culture told them they had no right to occupy. Their portraits exemplify not only their desire for respectability, but their search for steady ground, for a "place" they could claim as uniquely theirs, in which they could feel they belonged.

The Pope family photographs provide an extraordinary example of the multiple layers of meaning contained within historical images, and the difficulty and subjectivity

---

[135] Ibid., 188.

involved in interpreting that meaning. To do so with any success requires viewing such images within their historical context, and from a range of perspectives—as objects of value, power, and memory; as historical documents; as signifiers of status; as personal belongings; and also as larger social and political statements. This study has added support to the argument increasingly made by photohistorians that portraits must be considered not just as flat, two-dimensional pictures, but as concrete, tactile, perceptible objects that are physically utilized and manipulated within, and in relation to, social and political contexts. The ways individual families use photographs – displaying them in their homes, inscribing them, exchanging them with friends and relatives – are just as much a product of and response to those circumstances as is the subject matter of the photographs themselves.

We must also recognize that the contexts within which photographic objects and collections exist are ever-changing. Shawn Michelle Smith writes of archives as "vehicles of memory" which have an ideological function not just in the context of their inception but also across time, in that they determine what will be collectively remembered, and how it will be remembered.[136] The Pope photograph collection can be viewed as a "counterarchive," a primary source that opposes and brings into question the dominant historical narrative. The collection represents an individual attempt at African American archive building at a time when white Democrats in North Carolina, by establishing their own museums and repositories, were doing their utmost to ensure that *their* record of

---

[136] Smith, *Photography on the Color Line*, 8.

history would be considered the "official" one.[137] The history preserved in the Pope

portraits is the version they constructed on their terms; the one they found most flattering;

and the one they wanted to preserve for future generations.

Manassa, Delia, Ruth, and Evelyn Pope had no way of knowing that less than a

century later, their photographs would be in the hands of scholars instead of relatives.

The archive they constructed continues its life, though the circumstances surrounding it

are changing dramatically. As I write this thesis, the Pope family archive is in the process

of transformation from a "private" collection, kept scattered in boxes within the family

home, to a "public" one, organized, preserved, described, and made available in a

prominent institutional repository. I myself have played a major role in that

transformation. But just as I have changed the archive, the archive has changed me—and

will undoubtedly change others who are exposed to it. In this way, the Pope portraits

have the ability to rewrite not just history, but the future as well.

---

[137] See forthcoming dissertation by Kenneth Zogry for this argument about NC Democrats.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

PRIMARY SOURCES

<u>Manuscript/Photograph Collections</u>

Leatherwood, Captain Thomas L. "A New Epoch in Our History." Souvenir poster.
     Asheville, NC: 1900. Pope House Museum Foundation Collection.

Pope Family Papers #5085, Southern Historical Collection, Wilson Library, University of
     North Carolina at Chapel Hill, Chapel Hill, NC.

Pope Family Photograph Collection, Pope House Museum Foundation, Raleigh, NC.

Warshaw Collection of Business Americana, Archives Center, National Museum of
     American History, Smithsonian Institution.

<u>Published Works</u>

Adams, John H., Jr. "Rough Sketches: A Study of the Features of the Negro Woman." In
     Voice of the Negro 1, no. 8 (August 1904): 323-326.

Burroughs, Nannie H. "Not Color But Character." In *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 6 (June
     1904): 277-280.

_____. "Twelve Things the Negro Must Do For Himself." In *Nannie Helen
     Burroughs*, by Opal V. Easter. New York and London: Garland Publishing, Inc.,
     1995: 133-137.

Cooper, Anna Julia. *A Voice from the South by a Black Woman of the South.* Xenia, Ohio:
     Aldine Publishing, 1892.

Frazier, E. Franklin. "Durham: Capital of the Black Middle Class." In *The New Negro:
     An Interpretation*, by Alain Locke. New York: Albert and Charles Boni, Inc.,
     1925: 333-340.

Hunton, Addie. "Negro Womanhood Defended." In *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 7 (July
     1904): 280-282.

Johnson, Edward A. *History of the Negro Soldiers in the Spanish-American War.* Raleigh, NC: Capital Printing Co., 1899.

Landor, B. "The Black Man's Plea." In *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 7 (July 1904): 291.

Le Barge, J. A. and Fred Heltman, "Go To Sleep My Little Pickaninny." 1915. *Historic Sheet Music Collection*, Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/sheetmusic/> (accessed 21 December 2005).

Locke, Alain, ed. *The New Negro: An Interpretation*. New York: Albert and Charles Boni, Inc., 1925.

Payton, Lew and Alf. Wilson, "I Am That 'Hen Roost' Inspector Man." 1909. *Historic Sheet Music Collection*, Duke University Rare Book, Manuscript, and Special Collections Library: <http://scriptorium.lib.duke.edu/sheetmusic/> Accessed 14 April 2005.

Scruggs, Leonard Andrew. "Medical Education as a Factor in the Elevation of the Colored Race." In *African Expositor* 9 (April 1886): 3-5.

Thomas, William Hannibal. *The American Negro: What He Was, What He Is, and What He May Become.* New York: MacMillan, 1901.

Washington, Booker T., N. B. Wood, and Fannie Barrier Williams. *A New Negro for a New Century.* New York: Arno Press and the New York Times, 1969.

Williams, Sylvanie Francaz. "The Social Status of the Negro Woman." In *Voice of the Negro* 1, no. 7 (July 1904): 198-300.

"Without A Match." Bull Durham Tobacco advertisement, ca. 1900. *History of Jim Crow* website <http://www.jimcrowhistory.org/history/history.htm> Accessed 13 April 2005.

SECONDARY SOURCES

Articles/Essays

Ayres, William S. "Pictures in the American Home, 1880-1930." In *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930*, Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Manning, eds. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994: 149-164.

Batchen, Geoffrey. "Vernacular Photographies." *History of Photography* 24 (3), Autumn 2000: 262-271.

Brown, Elsa Barkley. "Neotiating and Transforming the Public Sphere: African American Political Life in the Transition from Slavery to Freedom." In *Women Transforming Politics: An Alternative Reader.* Cathy J. Cohen, Kathleen B. Jones, and Joan C. Tronto, eds. New York and London: New York University Press, 1997: 343-376.

Csikszentmihalyi, Mihaly. "Why We Need Things." In *History from Things*, Steven Lubar and W. David Kingery, eds. Washington and London: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993: 20-29.

Cullen, Jim. "I's a Man Now': Gender and African American Men." In *Divided Houses: Gender and the Civil War.* Catherine Clinton and Nina Silber, eds. New York and Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992.

Edwards, Elizabeth. "Material Beings: Objecthood and Ethnographic Photographs." *Visual Studies* 17 (1), 2002: 67-75.

--------. "Photographs as Objects of Memory." In *Material Memories: Design and Evocation.* Marcus Kwint, Christopher Breward and Jeremy Aynsley, eds. Oxford and New York: Berg, 1999. 221-236.

Edwards, Elizabeth and Janice Hart. "Introduction: Photographs as Objects." In *Photographs Objects Histories*. Elizabeth Edwards and Janice Hart, eds. London and New York: Routledge, 2004. 1-15.

Hatt, Michael. "'Making a Man of Him': Masculinity and the Black Body in Mid-Nineteenth-Century American Sculpture." *Oxford Art Journal* 15, no. 1 (1992). 21-22.

Hine, Darlene Clark. "Introduction." In *The Face of Our Past: Images of Black Women from Colonial America to the Present.* Kathleen Thompson and Hilary Mac Austin, eds. Bloomington and Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1999: ix-xiv.

Holland, Patricia. "History, Memory, and the Family Album." In *Family Snaps: The Meanings of Domestic Photography.* Jo Spence and Patricia Holland, eds. London: Virago Press, 1991.

hooks, bell. "In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life." In *Picturing Us: African American Identity in Photography*. Deborah Willis, ed. New York: The New Press, 1994: 42-53.

McCandless, Barbara. "The Portrait Studio and the Celebrity." In *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, Martha A. Sandweiss, ed. Fort Worth, Texas: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1991: 48-75.

Painter, Nell Irvin. "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known." *Journal of American History*, Vol. 81, No. 2 (Sept. 1994): 461-492.

Rogoff, Irit. "Studying Visual Culture." In *The Visual Culture Reader*, Nicholas Mizroeff, ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1998: 14-26.

Stavney, Anne. "Mothers of Tomorrow': The New Negro Renaissance and the Politics of Maternal Representation." *African American Review* Vol. 32, No. 4 (Winter 1998): 533-561.

Trachtenberg, Alan. "Photography: The Emergence of a Keyword." In *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, Martha A. Sandweiss, ed. Fort Worth: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1991: 16-47.

Wajda, Shirley Teresa. "The Artistic Portrait Photograph." In *The Arts and the American Home, 1890-1930.* Jessica H. Foy and Karal Ann Marling, eds. Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1994: 165-182.

Willis, Deborah. "The Sociologist's Eye: W.E.B. Du Bois and the Paris Exhibition." In *A Small Nation of People: W.E.B. Du Bois and African American Portraits of Progress*. Library of Congress, ed. New York: HarperCollins, 2003: 19-78.

Books

Booker, Christopher. *'I Will Wear No Chain!': A Social History of African American Males*. Westport, Connecticut: Praeger Publishers, 2000.

Carter, Wilmoth A. *The Urban Negro in the South.* New York: Vantage Press, 1961.

Daniels, Douglas Henry. *Pioneer Urbanites: A Social and Cultural History of Black San Francisco*. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1980.

Daugherty, Ellen Kathleen. *Lifting the Veil of Ignorance: The Visual Culture of African American Racial Uplift*. Ph.D. dissertation, University of Virginia, 2004.

Edmonds, Helen G. *The Negro and Fusion Politics in North Carolina, 1894-1901*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1951.

Gaines, Kevin Kelly. *Uplifting the Race: Black Leadership, Politics, and Culture in the Twentieth Century*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Gilmore, Glenda Elizabeth. *Gender and Jim Crow: Women and the Politics of White Supremacy in North Carolina, 1896-1920.* Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 1996.

Greenwood, Janette. *Bittersweet Legacy: The Black and White 'Better Classes' in Charlotte, 1850-1910*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1994.

Guy-Sheftall, Beverly. *Daughters of Sorrow: Attitudes Towards Black Women, 1880-1920.* Brooklyn: Carlson Publishing, Inc., 1990.

Hale, Grace Elizabeth. *Making Whiteness: the Culture of Segregation in the South, 1890-1940.* New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

Halttunen, Karen. *Confidence Men and Painted Women: A Study of Middle-Class Culture in America, 1830-1870*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1982.

Harris, Michael D., 1948-. *Colored Pictures: Race and Visual Representation*. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2003.

Higginbotham, Evelyn Brooks. *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church, 1880-1920.* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1993.

Hirsch, Julia. *Family Photographs: Content, Meaning, and Effect.* New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981.

Hunter, Tera W. *To 'Joy My Freedom: Southern Black Women's Lives and Labors After the Civil War*. Cambridge and London: Harvard University Press, 1997.

Kelley, Robin D.G. *Race Rebels: Culture, Politics, and the Black Working Class*. New York: The Free Press, 1994.

Kern-Foxworth, Marilyn. *Aunt Jemima, Uncle Ben, and Rastus: Blacks in Advertising, Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow*. Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1994.

Litwack, Leon. *Trouble in Mind: Black Southerners in the Age of Jim Crow*. New York: Vintage Books, 1998.

Natanson, Nicholas. *The Black Image in the New Deal: The Politics of FSA Photography.* Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 1992.

Sandweiss, Martha A. *Print the legend: Photography and the American West*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2002.

----------, ed. *Photography in Nineteenth Century America*. Fort Worth, Texas: Amon Carter Museum of Western Art, 1991.

Scott, James. *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts.* New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990.

Shaw, Stephanie J. *What a Woman Ought to Be and To Do: Black Professional Women Workers During the Jim Crow Era.* Chicago and London: University of Chicago Press, 1996.

Smith, Shawn Michelle. *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture*. Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 1999.

----------. *Photography on the Color Line: W.E.B. Du Bois, Race, and Visual Culture..* Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2004.

Summers, Martin. *Manliness and its Discontents: The Black Middle Class and the Transformation of Masculinity, 1900-1930.* Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2004.

Tagg, John. *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories.* Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988.

Thompson, Kathleen and Hilary Mac Austin, eds. *The Face of Our Past: Images of Black Women from Colonial America to the Present.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1999.

Trachtenberg, Alan. *Reading American Photographs: Images as History: Mathew Brady to Walker Evans.* New York: Hill and Wang, 1989.

Willis, Deborah. *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present.* New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 2000.

Zogry, Kenneth. Untitled PhD Dissertation, University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, forthcoming.