

The “Green-Backs of Civilization”: Sojourner Truth and Portrait Photography

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Stopping in Detroit in early February 1864 enroute to see President Lincoln, Sojourner Truth had her grandson write on her behalf to the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*.¹ She asked that the editor, Oliver Johnson, “insert a few words in THE STANDARD, informing the friends . . . that now I am about to have a new, and, I hope much better photograph taken of me, which a friend here is going to have copy-righted for my benefit.”² By the time this letter was published Sojourner Truth was a national figure. An activist for abolition, woman’s rights, universal suffrage, and the rights of freed and working-class African Americans, Truth was known as an electrifying speaker during a career in reform politics that spanned three decades.³ The letter her grandson wrote for her promoted Truth in deliberate ways. Truth reminded the *NASS* readership of both the work she had undertaken and the continued interest she drew as a public figure: “I have been absent from my home in Battle Creek more than 2 months, having been in this city [Detroit] since I came in November with a donation for the colored soldiers. During my absence a great many letters have been received for me, the most of which have been applications for my photograph, and one . . . requesting some copies of my ‘Life’ to sell for me.”⁴ In this short letter Truth mentioned her photographs six and her *Narrative* three times, both of which she sold at speaking engagements and reform meetings in order to support herself and her travel.⁵ She made it clear that these photographs were in demand by a

public who had shown such interest in her life and labors that she found “my books are all sold, but . . . a kind lady . . . is endeavoring to obtain money enough to pay for the printing of another edition.”⁶ Indeed, Truth’s *Narrative* went through five editions from 1850 to 1884, and she is said to have carried copies of it in a distinctive cloth bag along with *cartes de visite* and cabinet cards she had made and reprinted between 1863 and her death in 1883.⁷

Of the photographs, Truth reportedly said she “used to be sold for other people’s benefit, but now she sold herself for her own,” declaring that she aimed to “sell the shadow in order to support the substance.”⁸ This phrase, “I sell the shadow to support the substance,” was printed on the bottom of her *cartes de visite* as early as 1864 and on her cabinet cards in the 1870s, and it is this self-determination and control her photographs ostensibly assert that has recently interested those studying her work and life. There is a dearth of scholarship on Truth’s photographs, but two scholars who have recently challenged our understanding of Truth, Nell Irvin Painter and Carla Peterson, have addressed her use of these studio photographs.⁹ In her highly regarded biography of Truth, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol*, Painter devotes a chapter to Truth’s photographs and argues that her “photographs gave her an intangible independence, liberating her from the printed words of others . . . Truth could not write, but . . . [p]hotographs furnished a new means of communication—one more powerful than writing. They allowed Truth to circumvent genteel discourse and the racial stereotype embedded in her nation’s language.”¹⁰ Elsewhere, Painter has contended that Truth “used photography to embody and to empower herself, to present the images of herself that *she* wanted remembered.”¹¹ In a chapter devoted to Truth in her groundbreaking study, *“Doers of the Word”*: *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)*, Carla Peterson also considers the circulation of Truth’s photographs and offers her interpretation of them. Like Painter, Peterson regards these photographs as “function[ing] for Truth as a form of autobiography, of recorded testimony.”¹² Yet Peterson is more interested in the way in which Truth’s photographs “suggest an interesting ambiguity of cultural form.” A “commodified object,” the photograph “at the same time . . . produces a subjective reality and may function as a more personal means of communication, as a form of writing.” For Peterson, Truth’s portraits ultimately come to be forms of self-representation that “allowed her to challenge commodification” by presenting “her photographs as an image for consumption by her white abolitionist audiences” while protecting herself from such commodification.¹³ Scholarship on Sojourner Truth’s photographs, then, interprets them as a means of self-representation to circumvent the racist discourses of the day, resist commodification, and present empowering images of herself.

In viewing these photographs as resisting racial stereotypes and commodification, scholars seem to be responding to representations of Truth as a passive creation of reformers who needed a former slave as symbol of the

slave's and woman's oppression. In particular, questions regarding the accuracy of Frances Dana Gage's record of Truth's famous 1851 "A'n't I a Woman?" speech have left scholars of her life and work noting "[w]e simply have no way of ascertaining what Truth actually said."¹⁴ Yet the desire to find a "real" Sojourner Truth beyond the problematic representations of reformers has led them to examine her control over these images, communicating through them in ways she could not through an amanuensis, a newspaper report, or a reformer's recollection.

However, the conventions and uses of portrait photography in the United States at this time complicate such understandings of self-representation. Indeed, an extensive body of scholarship exists on photography as "integral to the production of a *racialized* middle-class identity over the course of the nineteenth century,"¹⁵ suggesting that visual codes could subordinate, as well as represent, "the self" to others. In contrast to the prevailing reading of Truth's photographs, I contend that just as we cannot know Truth's intentions, we also cannot infer that what she may have wanted her photographs to represent came to be how they were viewed and understood. This is not to say that Truth's photographs cannot be understood as resistant, but that any understanding of her agency in their production and circulation is complicated by the uses and assumed meanings of photographic portraits at the time.

Truth's photographs are highly mediated representations whose use of existing visual codes has generated varied and sometimes contradictory readings of them. This complicates our search for a "real" Truth, particularly when we consider elements of both evidentiary and bourgeois portrait photography.¹⁶ Significantly, to invest these portraits with the "real," liberated Truth is, I argue, to ignore the larger evidentiary photographic discourse of racial "typology" in which African Americans were represented at mid-century. Because Truth also circulated as "type" in both visual and narrative representations of abolition and her work within this movement, such a discourse may well have influenced the way those who purchased her photographs understood them. Moreover, as I also contend, to see the "real" in these portraits risks eliding the position of portrait photography within a larger discourse of sentiment that "rearranged the real" in order to mark class and racial hierarchies, particularly among women. In particular, to propose that in her portraits we find the Truth that eludes us elsewhere is to invoke notions of interiority and possessive individualism that were, in fact, racially coded in and through mid-nineteenth-century bourgeois portraiture. Instead, we must understand that the visual codes and ideological investments of bourgeois portraits were deeply implicated in evidentiary photography. Bourgeois portraiture drew on physiognomy and its notion that the body signalled "essence," just as evidentiary photography was enlisted to prove essential types. While bourgeois portraiture was believed to document middle-class interiority, evidentiary photography ostensibly documented its presumed absence in the lower classes, the criminal and the racial "other,"

inextricably linking one photographic practice to the other. Consequently, racial stereotype becomes difficult to circumvent whether explicitly in the form of evidentiary photography or implicitly in the conventions of bourgeois portraiture.

Far from being liberated from a racialist typology, Sojourner Truth was often called upon to speak on anti-slavery and woman's rights platforms as an embodiment of the slave's or woman's oppression. There are, however, suggestions that she manipulated her status as type or "Negro Exhibit."¹⁷ Indeed Painter argues that by the late 1850s Truth began to represent herself as the "mammy" type of Southern slave lore. Famously, at Silver Lake, Indiana, in 1858 Truth reportedly bared her breast in response to a Dr. T.W. Strain's accusation that she "was an impostor; that she was, indeed, a man disguised in women's clothing. It appears, too, . . . that they [the 'border-ruffian Democracy'] suspected her to be a mercenary hireling of the Republican party."¹⁸ As she did so, Truth presented her breast as a slave woman's: "Sojourner told them that her breasts had suckled many a white babe, to the exclusion of her own offspring; that some of those white babies had grown to man's estate; that, although they had sucked her colored breast, they were, in her estimation, far more manly than they (her persecutors) appeared to be; and she quietly asked them, as she disrobed her bosom, if they, too, wished to suck!"¹⁹

Truth's reported argument and bodily testimony suggest that she recognized and had come to turn to her advantage such moments of coerced embodiment. In what has become a mythic incident on par with her arm-baring "A'n't I a Woman?" speech, she gains rhetorical force for her argument by symbolizing a slave "type" that by 1858 was a convention with some currency on the anti-slavery lecture circuit. Painter argues that it is unlikely Truth ever nursed a white child: "As a young woman she lived with the Dumonts, whose daughter was not much younger than she. Wet nursing by slaves was far more prevalent in the plantation South than Dutch New York." She goes on to contend that at this time, Truth's appearance as a former slave connoted for her Northern, white reformer audience a Southern rather than Northern setting and set of experiences.²⁰ Painter argues that "[a]s an authentic representative of slavery, Truth . . . was refashioning herself as a Southerner," but how much Truth may have played to and capitalized on such expectations is difficult to determine.²¹ Yet it is significant that her "defence" against Dr. Strain's accusation that her "voice is not the voice of a woman, it is the voice of a man, and we believe you are a man,"²² is not to stress her femininity but to present herself as a "type," the mammy or wet nurse of the South. Truth does not invoke notions of decorum or propriety as conventional codes of femininity at Silver Lake, though she is represented as doing so in her "A'n't I a Woman?" speech: "Nobody eber helps me into carriages, or ober mud-puddles, or gibs me my best place."²³ It is almost as if Truth took to an extreme Strain's challenge that she was believable as a former slave on the platform but not as a woman. According to this report, Truth foregrounds an economy of race, gender, and property in which "the breast" as

bodily evidence of her identity as *woman* is, in fact, impossible evidence to give. Rather, she exposes her "colored breast" and thereby testifies to the mutual exclusion of "slave" and "woman" as identities she can claim, presenting her breast as the tool of a maternal labor enforced so that the white woman, not the slave, can prove herself to be "womanly."

Truth's circulation as type or "Negro Exhibit" was not limited to public speaking engagements or reform meetings, but extended to the visual arts. In 1863, just five years after her Silver Lake appearance and in the same year that she sat for her first *cartes*, Sojourner Truth was known internationally as the inspiration for William Wetmore Story's statue, *Libyan Sibyl*.²⁴ As Painter has documented, Truth paid a visit to Harriet Beecher Stowe in 1853 in order to secure an endorsement for her *Narrative*.²⁵ Stowe did not offer her recollection of that meeting until a decade later in an *Atlantic Monthly* article, "Sojourner Truth, the Libyan Sibyl." While Stowe's article has been much critiqued as an exoticized caricature of Truth, replete with plantation-style dialect and a minstrel-like description of her grandson,²⁶ it arguably "made Truth into an intriguing figure for many Americans for the first time."²⁷ The visibility Truth achieved was created not only by Stowe's immensely popular article, but also by the recognizability of Story's *Libyan Sibyl* (1860-61), which had become world-renowned after its success at London's Great Exhibition of 1862, where it marked his first major recognition as a sculptor. In her *Atlantic Monthly* article, Stowe claimed she told Story of the 1853 meeting with Truth, and "[a] few days after, he told me that he had conceived the . . . Libyan Sibyl." Stowe quotes a description of Story's statue from the London *Atheneum*: "The *Sibilla Libica* has crossed her knees—an action universally held amongst the ancients as indicative of reticence or secrecy, and of power to bind. . . . [A]nd to keep her secrets closer, for this Libyan woman is the closest of all the sibyls, she rests her shut mouth upon one closed palm, as if holding the African mystery deep in the brooding brain that looks out through mournful, warning eyes."²⁸

In Stowe's article, Truth inspires Story and effectively becomes the secretive "type" of mysterious Africa. Truth, however, never sat for Story and "Story himself never connected Truth or Stowe with" the statue.²⁹ Instead, he spoke of his *Libyan Sibyl* as an "anti-slavery sermon in stone" inspired by Roman art and iconography, a depiction of Africa "see[ing] the terrible fate of her race. . . . Slavery on the horizon."³⁰ If one is to connect Truth at all to Story's statue, one must rely heavily on type and, importantly, on a typology that removes Truth from the particularity of American slavery and her abolition work to a mythical Africa. Stowe did just that in her *Atlantic Monthly* article, describing Truth as "full-blooded African . . . [a] fine specimen of the torrid zone."³¹ While American papers like *Harper's* hailed the statue as America's national symbol, newspapers and reformers alike began calling Truth the Libyan, Ethiopian, African, Sable and American Sibyl.³² Rather quickly, then, Truth became a national figure through this famous textual caricature and marble statue. It seems more than

coincidence that she would choose to sit “for her first photographic portraits within a month of the publication of Stowe’s ‘Libyan Sibyl,’”³³ and while Story’s statue was being celebrated as a national symbol. That first session would be one of at least seven sittings Truth would undertake between 1863 and 1875.³⁴ She originally had *cartes de visite* made and when the larger cabinet card grew in popularity during the mid-1870s, Truth had photographs made in both formats likely because *cartes* were cheaper and easier to mail or carry with one to distribute or sell, as Truth did.³⁵

First introduced by the French photographer A. A. Disdéri in 1854, *cartes de visite* appeared in the United States in the summer of 1859 and in one year had become a “major fashion.” Measuring 2 $\frac{1}{8}$ ” X 3 $\frac{1}{2}$ ” and mounted inexpensively, the *carte de visite* quickly became collectible; people not only had their own *cartes* made, but they purchased *cartes* of celebrities, notable Americans (statesmen and military leaders), and so-called oddities (Siamese twins, thin men, dwarfs) as “cartomania” spread.³⁶ Prices ranged from \$1.50 to three dollars per dozen, the average price being under twenty cents per *carte*.³⁷ Its popularity and accessibility caused the *carte de visite* to be hailed as the democratization of photography in the United States, an inexpensive form of studio portraiture used by citizens and celebrities alike.

However affordable *cartes de visite* may have been, they were nonetheless part of an archive of photographic portraiture that disciplined the middle and lower classes, even as it promised access to a form of self-representation from which they had previously been excluded. As Suren Lavvani argues, we are mistaken to see photography as straightforwardly democratizing portraiture by extending it beyond the purview of the aristocracy. Rather, photography “ushered” the previously excluded “into a representational system [that] . . . bound them securely into a dominant discourse” able “to reify multiple bodies into particular types of bodies.”³⁸ In his formative article “The Body and the Archive,” Allan Sekula has referred to this representational system as “a *shadow archive* that encompasses an entire social terrain while positioning individuals within that terrain” such that “[e]very portrait implicitly took its place within a social and moral hierarchy.” Sekula goes on to examine photography in the service of physiognomy and phrenology, sciences that read the body’s surface, particularly the face and head, as indicative of character, noting that “[e]specially in the United States, the proliferation of photography and that of phrenology were quite coincident.”³⁹ The result, he argues, is that “photography came to establish and delimit the terrain of the *other*, to define both the *generalized look*—the *typology*—and the *contingent instance* of deviance and social pathology” (7).⁴⁰ Bodies were not only “typed” through the use of photographic portraiture, but individuals were also socially disciplined by exposure to the medium, particularly those outside the upper class whose portraits served “as a means of moral education for the American public, who could view images of the ‘representative man and woman’ through public exhibitions, mass publications, or copies

displayed in their own homes and, by example, be inspired by . . . [and] learn how to present themselves as good Americans."⁴¹ The photographic portrait, presented as socially ameliorative, took on a repressive function within a mid-nineteenth-century American culture that had come to a "heightened awareness . . . [of] the body . . . [as] a cultural and class signifier in a society increasingly mediated by visual interaction. . . ."⁴²

However, the sciences of phrenology and physiognomy "read" not only class but also racial difference in the body and documented this through evidentiary photography. Critics and historians of photography frequently cite the influence of Francis Galton (a founder of eugenics), and his composite photographs to document the ways in which, as Shawn Michelle Smith puts it, the racial other was "denied" an interiority or interior character beyond the "inherent biological essence" of the racial "type." Galton's evidentiary photographs "reinforced middle-class discourses of sacred, exclusive interiority by providing and containing a 'threatening' counterexample" and "encourag[ing] white surveillance over a racialized social body."⁴³

Bringing evidentiary photography closer to home than British eugenics, however, I suggest that the daguerreotypes of African slaves taken by Joseph T. Zealy in 1850 for Louis Agassiz in Columbia, South Carolina represent a significant way in which portraits of African Americans were read at mid-century.⁴⁴ In his studio, Zealy produced fifteen daguerreotypes of seven slaves. The five men and two women photographed, identified as Gullah, Guinea, Congo and Mandingo, were Jack (a slave driver), Renty, Drana (Jack's daughter), Delia (Renty's daughter), Fassena (a carpenter), Alfred and Jem. Zealy photographed for Agassiz's study of "pure" African types to prove his theory of the separate creation of, and anthropometric differences between, the races. The men and women photographed were often forced to pose naked for the purposes of photographic documentation. As Brian Wallis notes, the daguerreotypes form two series: the first "reflect[s] a physiognomic approach" in its full body poses, "showing front, side, and rear views" of two subjects, while the second "adhere[s] to a phrenological approach," being "more tightly focused [and] showing the heads and naked torsos" of the remaining men and the two women.⁴⁵

While Zealy's portraits were "firsts" of their kind—"there was no precedent in America for the type of photographic collection that Agassiz sought to build"⁴⁶—their emphasis on the body had an impact beyond Agassiz's study of the pure African type. "The discourse on slavery and abolitionism was typified by such external views of the body," notes Wallis as he points out that one of the most widely circulated abolitionist images was *The Scourged Back*⁴⁷ (1863), a *carte de visite* depicting the heavily scarred back of a slave whose shirt, like the slaves in Zealy's portraits, has fallen to his waist, thereby exposing his torso.⁴⁸ Circulating in photographic images, then, was the equivalent of what Houston Baker has called "The Negro Exhibit"—the exposure of the fugitive slave's scarred body on the abolitionist platform—as sensational proof of slavery's

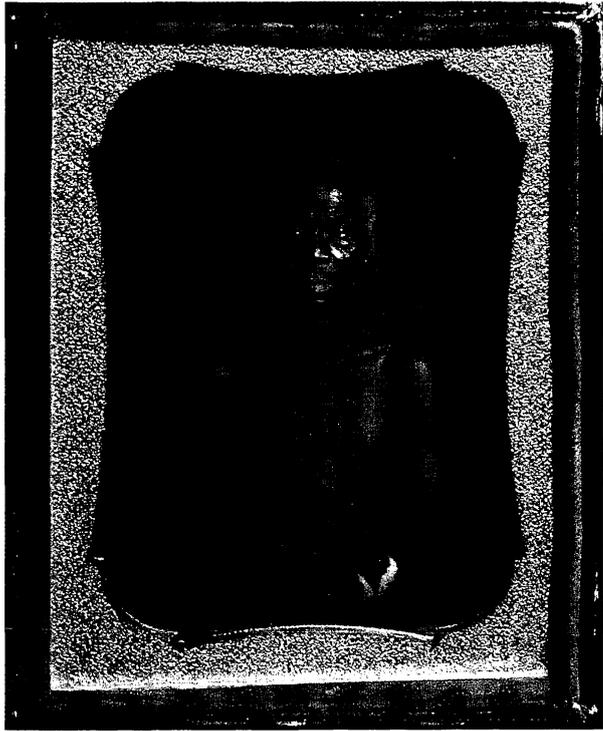


Figure 1: “Renty, Congo. Plantation of B.F. Taylor, Esq.” Daguerreotype by J.T. Zealy, Columbia, S.C., March 1850. Photograph courtesy of The Peabody Museum, Harvard University, Photo T1867.

horrors: “His or her body, in all of its marked and visible clarity of wounding, made affective the metaphors of moral suasion propounded by white abolitionists . . . [and] became an erotic sign of servitude in [that] social, liberational discourse.”⁴⁹ Agassiz’s studies and Zealy’s evidentiary portraits fueled pro-slavery arguments, yet they also established visual codes that positioned African Americans as “types,” albeit of slavery’s outrages, within anti-slavery appeals. Wallis contends that, “typological photographs—particularly those that became popular in the 1860s and 1870s,” when Truth’s portraits were made and circulated, “were assumed to be self-evident, to speak for themselves and, at the same time, to be generic.”⁵⁰

Reformers certainly represented truth as a type or generic example of the slave’s and woman’s oppression, and she may herself have reinforced that myth even as she challenged certain aspects of it, as she did in response to Dr. Strain’s outburst at Silver Lake. Similarly, there are ways in which her *cartes de visite* and cabinet cards can be read simultaneously as both conforming to and contradicting the visual codes of evidentiary photography that would position



Figure 2: Gordon, *The Scourged Back*, ca. 1863, M'Pherson and Oliver photographer. Photo courtesy of The Library Company of Philadelphia.

her as racial type. Particularly, we might read Truth's photographs as "Negro Exhibits" of the marked slave as body, and on the one hand and see them accessing elements of bourgeois portraiture designed to signal an interiority beyond the body through markers of domesticity and sentiment, on the other. I will consider what first appear to be contradictory readings of her photographs by examining the marked body and the use of frontality versus asymmetry in evidentiary portraits, as well as the domestic and sentimental elements in, and uses of, bourgeois portraits. As we shall see, neither set of visual codes is independent of the other, thereby complicating a reading of Truth's portraits.

Because Truth's daughter, Diana Corbin, also sat for cabinet card photographs in similar attire—plain dark dress, white shawl, and head wrap—her "widely circulated" portraits have been mistaken for her mother's.⁵¹ Kathleen Collins, in the most detailed study of Truth's portraits, has consequently argued that "only one sure method of identification is available to us: Sojourner's right index finger was cut off by a scythe during her last year as a slave." Indeed, as Collins points out, several of Truth's portraits clearly show her damaged hand "in a position which allows us to see [her] amputated finger stub."⁵² (Figures 3, 6) In others, it is more difficult to notice because the hand is either turned inward or Truth covers it with her left. (Figures 4, 5) While such observations have been important in determining how many extant photographs of Truth we can document, when she had them made and at what studios, criteria like Collins' unintentionally and perhaps unavoidably invoke the marked slave body as type. The "real" Sojourner Truth is a body damaged by enslavement and is invoked as the one "sure" or reliable sign of whom we see in these portraits. Notably, the portrait in which, as Collins points out, Truth's damaged hand is most clearly in view resting on her cane is the same photograph Susan B. Anthony used to raise money for the Woman's Loyal National League's "*million-voiced petition*" at the League's anniversary meeting in New York City's Church of the Puritans on May 14, 1864. (Figure 3) The New York *World* reported that Anthony urged her audience to donate money needed to circulate and promote this petition by holding "up two photographs to the audience. One represented 'Sojourner Truth,' the heroine of one of Mrs H.B. Stowe's tales, and the other the bare back of a Louisiana slave. . . . 'Sojourner Truth' had lost three fingers of one hand, and the Louisiana slave's back bore scars of whipping."⁵³ Significantly, in Anthony's appeal, Truth becomes Stowe's creation and her lost finger becomes three. Whatever Truth's intentions in having this portrait made, it circulates here as bodily evidence of slavery's outrages, alongside what is surely the "Scourged Back" *carte*, and as embodied grounding for Anthony's appeal. We invoke this evidentiary reading when we take Truth's damaged body as a sign of the real, but in doing so we risk limiting her significance to that of (former) slave.

This turn to the body, however, also underscores Lalvani's contention that photographic portraiture is not simply coincident with physiognomy and phrenology, but "united" with these sciences "by a common paradigm." Far from being limited to evidentiary portraits, bourgeois portraiture, "especially



Figure 3: Sojourner Truth, 1864, *cart de visite*, photographer unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.



I SELL THE SHADOW TO SUPPORT THE SUBSTANCE.
SOJOURNER TRUTH.

Randall

East Grand Circus Park,

DETROIT.

Figure 4: Sojourner Truth, ca. 1870, cabinet card, Randall studio, Detroit. Photograph courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.

[in] the arrangements of heads, shoulders, and hands—‘as if those parts of our body were our truth,’—give[s] evidence of the discursive power of physiognomy.”⁵⁴ Taking the body as the sign of *who one is*, in other words, is common to both forms of photography. Reading the visual codes of evidentiary photography against those of bourgeois portraiture in the posing of that body, however, suggests that Truth’s portraits elude the typology of evidentiary photography through the use of asymmetry rather than frontality. In none of her portraits does Truth face the camera head-on, as the slave subjects of Agassiz’s archive were posed. John Tagg argues that frontality was read as signifying “the bluntness and ‘naturalness’ of a culturally unsophisticated class,” in contrast to the “cultivated asymmetries of aristocratic posture . . . passed on down the social hierarchy, as the middle classes secured their cultural hegemony.”⁵⁵ Truth poses variously with her body toward, yet her face turned askance from, the lens; with both face and body asymmetrically posed; or with her body posed asymmetrically while her face turns toward the camera. In all, asymmetry rather than frontality predominates, which suggests that Truth’s portraits subvert the visual codes governing the “typing” of raced and classed bodies.

Yet Tagg’s phrasing also challenges the tendency to interpret asymmetry as subversive in photographic portraits. Asymmetry was “cultivated” in bourgeois portraiture, making it difficult to ascribe to Truth, rather than to her photographer, the “formula” of studio portraiture, generally and of *cartes de visite*, specifically, where “posing was standardised and quick” for the inexpensive photos.⁵⁶ Truth’s asymmetrical poses could be read as resisting an evidentiary gaze, yet in many ways they also conform to the standardized elements of bourgeois portraiture that drew on physiognomy, the very discourse evidentiary photography was used to “prove.” Both styles of portraiture, the bourgeois and the evidentiary, relied upon physiognomy’s claim that the body was the sign of essence—either of “deviance” or, for the middle class, inner character or moral depth: “[P]hotographers operat[ed] within discourses of physiognomy, which gave them a set of typologies by which to orchestrate and adjust posture, expression and lighting. . . . [In] the conventions of display regarding both dress and arrangement of the body in portraiture, we are confronted with an elaborate set of signs that symbolically evoke the bourgeois cultural ideal.”⁵⁷ Rather than read these two types of photography against one another, one as socially ameliorative and the other as repressive, we must recognize that bourgeois portraiture and evidentiary photography were deeply implicated in one another. Not only did bourgeois portraiture seek to claim interiority for the middle classes in opposition to its photographically documented absence in the “racial other” and the “lower classes,” but it also did so through codes established originally for the surveillance of these “lower” types, as Sekula has noted. In other words, those codes of the bourgeois cannot signal Truth’s, or any sitter’s, liberation from the surveillance of photographic typologies. Rather, Truth’s portraits are revealing for the way in which they enable contradictory or opposed readings of what are



Figure 5: Sojourner Truth, 1864, *carte de visite*, photographer unknown. Photograph courtesy of National Portrait Gallery, Smithsonian Institution.



Figure 6: Sojourner Truth, ca. 1860s, format and photographer unknown. Photograph courtesy of the Burton Historical Collection, Detroit Public Library.

interimplicated photographic discourses that use similar conventions to position subjects very differently in a social hierarchy according to class, race, and gender.

While mid nineteenth-century bourgeois portraits of African Americans are rare, they do exist and, as Douglas Henry Daniels notes, nineteenth-century African Americans “were fascinated by this medium and more likely to have pictorial than written documents.”⁵⁸ Daniels argues that this fascination also registers an African American use of “photographs to reassure themselves that their complexions, physical features, posture, manners, and style were as far removed as possible from” demeaning racist stereotypes and caricatures.⁵⁹ Like other bourgeois portraits, Truth’s *cartes de visite* and cabinet cards are strongly marked by a bourgeois ideal evoked through setting and props. Truth often posed in somewhat plain and more ornate domestic settings that included props like flowers, books, knitting, carved chairs, and mantles. In fact, both Collins and Painter have contended that the setting of Truth’s favorite photograph was not ornate; the background is plain except for the patterned table covering, though more laden with props. (Figure 5) While Painter does not indicate why she calls this Truth’s favorite photo,⁶⁰ Collins contends that this was one of three that Truth favored because it is a “*carte-de-visite* ‘twin’” of a larger cabinet card, suggesting Truth may have “returned to the same studio to recreate a favourite pose.”⁶¹ Truth may have chosen these settings simply because she liked them, because she recognized them as conventions of the day, because they signalled a “civility” presumed lacking in African Americans, or because she sought to construct a self that her middle-class reformer public would recognize.⁶²

It is also possible, however, that Truth simply obtained the style of photographs available from studios of the time, complete with stock props. Although current scholarship on Truth’s photographs contends they were a resistant form of self-representation, it nonetheless acknowledges that they were stylized to an extent. As Peterson observes, “we have no way of knowing who was responsible for Truth’s cultural presentation in her photographs.”⁶³ Studio settings, like those in which Truth posed, ranged from simple to lavish, and by the mid-1860s “[p]ainted scenery on panels or rolls of up to twenty scenes as well as papier-mâché and cardboard columns, fences, or fireplaces could be ordered from supply houses. . . .”⁶⁴ Since Truth could neither read nor write, the book on the table in Figure 5 stands out quite starkly as a bourgeois convention. Studio posing had quickly moved beyond Disdéri’s initial *cartes*, which posed “the model with a property emblematic of his profession,” to become quite formulaic.⁶⁵ Indeed, Truth’s portraits are highly conventional in their use of columns, chairs, and small tables. “The pose,” wrote William Kurtz in 1871, was “invariably stereotyped; here the inevitable little table, the irrepressible columns, chairs, hanging curtains.”⁶⁶ Unlike the evidentiary “type,” which “discourage[d] style and composition,” making it appear “to have no author,” bourgeois portraits were carefully styled and arranged, however formulaic and predictable that arranging became.⁶⁷

Such studio conventions also signal the way in which *cartes de visite* and the later cabinet card were part of a nineteenth-century culture of bourgeois sentiment. "Card portraits, as everybody knows," wrote Oliver Wendell Holmes in the June 1859 edition of *The Atlantic Monthly*, "have become the social currency, the sentimental 'green-backs' of civilization."⁶⁸ Markers of the domestic, like props and settings, are perhaps the most easily recognizable way in which studio photography participated in a larger cultural discourse of sentimentality. "Like domestic novels, . . . [photographic portraits] helped to make, not merely to mirror, the home . . . [and were] another mode of domestic self-representation," argues Laura Wexler.⁶⁹ Importantly, portraits could make the ideal rather than mirror the real, and "document" it through the codes of physiognomy. In language echoing that science, Karen Sanchez-Eppler reminds us that sentimentality was a "rearranging [of] the real," in which "the self is externally displayed, and the body [was believed to] provide a reliable sign of who one is."⁷⁰ Specifically, photography "worked by staging affect or imaging relation," and by presenting that staged or constructed relation as "a very powerful image of the 'Real.'"⁷¹

Photographic portraiture was a tool for encoding and making "real" or "natural" a social hierarchy or system of relations through the use of sentiment. "Sentimental ideologies of women explicitly turned to images to mark the social divisions advanced by the middle class and to make them seem rooted in something actual," notes Wexler. "[B]ourgeois domestic photography . . . related images of women to one another and to other cultural practices through a hierarchizing narrative of social signs." There were several ways in which bourgeois domestic photography imaged a hierarchy of white over black, according to Wexler: studio portraits might simply "excise" African American servants or slaves while those taken at home by itinerant photographers might position black subjects "on the edges of the family group." While Wexler points out that such a positioning at the edge of the family extends "sentiment . . . towards them," these individuals are clearly marked as its outer limit.⁷² Finally, bourgeois family portraits might include sittings of African American "nursemaids" with their white charges, portraits that, rather than challenging a racialized hierarchy by including a black person as subject, were designed to reinforce that hierarchy by enlisting the nursemaid to "enhance by contrast."⁷³

The question of what possible effects Sojourner Truth's domestic portraits might have had as purchased collectibles is worth considering in the context of sentimental portraiture that Wexler outlines. As I have noted, bourgeois portraits of African Americans are considered rare at mid-century, raising the question of how they might relate to the visual hierarchy of race scripted through the sentiment of middle-class portraiture. If such portraits were seen outside the African American homes of their subjects, in studio galleries for example, their capacity to disrupt that racialized hierarchy by accessing its signs of "real" middle-class domesticity could be powerful.⁷⁴ Certainly, what is visible or what

subjectivities are recognizable in this sign system is central to the power it wields and the anxieties it both reveals and functions to quell: “[T]hese ubiquitous reflections of private life in private homes must also have demarcated the edges of social visibility and invisibility for [the middle class] . . . who, not yet secure, repeatedly invoked the materiality of appearances to justify their claim to dominance.”⁷⁵

Bourgeois portraits of African Americans may also have offered their sitters and other African Americans who viewed them the opportunity to exercise what Claudia Tate has called “political desire.” Tate’s reading of African American domestic fiction and its function can be applied to bourgeois portraiture; both technologies arguably made possible the imagined realization of African American political desire by offering “the recently emancipated an occasion for exercising political self-definition” as full citizens with access to bourgeois cultural codes that had been denied them.⁷⁶ Bourgeois portraits of African Americans, as all portraits, were “of value principally because of the viewer’s relationship to the sitter, the ability to recognize the subject,”⁷⁷ and, most importantly, because such portraits facilitated self-recognition. In such a reading, bourgeois portraiture becomes a means for African Americans to insert themselves in sentimental scripts of the home and family relations from which they had been either excluded or marginalized as the limit of, or contrast to, whiteness. One might argue that whether or not Truth chose the bourgeois domestic settings of her portraits, they nonetheless work ironically to invoke a discourse of womanhood dependent upon her exclusion as a black woman. Those settings might also be said to mark her access, however momentary, to a racialized bourgeois domesticity and sentiment, thereby creating an ideological rupture in those social hierarchies constituted and maintained by photography. In such a reading Truth not only inserts herself in the center of a visually documented sentimentality, “a space ordinarily off limits to women like her,”⁷⁸ but also disrupts that racially coded practice. Since black and white women were positioned in a dialectical relation in such constructions of womanhood, Truth would necessarily challenge rather than simply appropriate or embrace this discourse and the identity it scripts.

While we have few references to African American individuals buying Truth’s portraits, we know that she did carry them with her to sell along with her songs at lectures. Truth reportedly lectured to predominantly white audiences far more than to African American gatherings, but Kathleen Collins has found one reference to an African American supporter, who, like others, sold copies of Truth’s “photographs . . . [and] sent [her] the proceeds.”⁷⁹ A Connecticut woman, Josephine J. Franklin, wrote Truth in the spring of 1864 that she had sold all but one of the photos Truth had sent her. “[R]etaining one for myself,” she wrote, “I gave one to my sister . . . in the city of Poughkeepsie and the other to my niece . . . in the city of Brooklyn. . . . You asked me if I was of your race. I am proud to say I am of the same race that you are.”⁸⁰ Significantly, Franklin’s letter expresses not only her pride in Truth’s work, but also her use of Truth’s portrait

to promote an affective connection amongst family members, linking sisters, aunts, and nieces. Such a use is both sentimental, in its attention to affective relations, and political, in its support of and affiliation with Truth's work. Indeed, Truth's portraits can be read as politicized by making imaginable, if not accessible, a domesticity and sentimentality that, because it was racialized "white," was regarded as inappropriate or incongruous for African Americans. Figure 6, where Truth is posed with what Painter suggests is a photo of her grandson James Caldwell on her lap, is highly sentimental in its staging of affective relation. The portrait with Truth holding her knitting and yarn could be said to signal both a domestic femininity and "a motherly womanliness."⁸¹ Finally, we might also read the props of Figure 4 as signalling a decidedly middle-class domesticity in their ornateness.

There is however an important variability in these portraits that serves to counter such readings, again opening up the possibility for varied and contradictory readings of Truth's photographs. In that sentimental portrait, Figure 6, Truth's manner of dress is "folk" rather than middle class, and she chooses elsewhere to dress in a plain, Quaker style, "her daily custom."⁸² It is important to note that this style was shared by Truth's reform contemporaries, "feminist and anti-slavery lecturers [who] wore [Quaker-style clothing] to distinguish themselves from showily dressed actresses, their less reputable colleagues in female public performance."⁸³ Rather than solely interpreting her portraits as subverting sentiment's social hierarchy, Truth's photographs indicate very different modes of self-presentation that at times position her as folk other to a middle-class ideal, and at other times more closely approach that ideal through conservative dress and domestic or sentimental props.

Despite this ambiguity, scholarship on Truth's portraits argues that they can be read as oppositional or subversive of what Wexler calls an "aggressive, rather than merely a private, social practice"⁸⁴ of using photography to encode sentiment and domesticity as the hallmarks of middle-class whiteness. Painter implicitly reminds us of Zealy's photographs when she argues that Truth's portraits solidly position her as bourgeois: "Truth reveals nothing that would make her into an African or into an exotic of any kind at all. The *cartes-de-visite* show a solid bourgeoisie. . . . With only her face and hands uncovered, hers is the antithesis of a naked body."⁸⁵ Peterson, on the other hand, stresses the portraits' ambiguity and makes that quality, rather than their bourgeois codes, the basis of resistant agency: "The effect of these photographs is to present Truth to the observer as a hybrid, to endow her with a social and cultural ambiguity that defies categorization and perhaps allowed her to challenge commodification."⁸⁶ Perhaps Truth's portraits affirmed the political desires of her African American viewers. Yet perhaps Truth also circulated as an oddity through these portraits as either socially and culturally ambiguous in her dress and/or posing, or as a black woman presenting herself through bourgeois domesticity and sentiment. I do not argue against the possibility of Truth's agency, in and of itself. Rather, I find compelling the suggestion that Truth exercised a self-presentation antithetical to the racist

typologies produced by Agassiz or one that makes possible her challenge to commodification. Yet I believe we need to consider such questions alongside our awareness that we do not know how Truth in these photographs appeared to those who purchased them. Truth's photographs, indeed, may have proven challenging to those who saw them, raising anxieties about the white bourgeois subject's position within a social hierarchy that photography worked to maintain. Whatever anxiety they raised, however, may also have been limited by her status as unusual, either as a public figure or as an oddity of sorts, thereby reinserting her into a discourse of "deviance."

Questions of individual and cultural resistance and subversion must also be placed in the context of photography as an instrument with which a white middle class sought to consolidate its social position. Importantly, that consolidation of dominance was also routed through appeals to presence and interiority. In ascribing a resistant agency to Truth simply by virtue of how she *appears* in her portraits, we are invoking uncritically the very white middle-class belief that through portraiture one could "claim presence in representation"⁸⁷ and a privileged interiority. As Shawn Michelle Smith outlines in *American Archives*, debates over the photographic "likeness" versus the photographic portrait would reach a peak in influential journals such as Stieglitz's *Camera Notes* late in the nineteenth century, but questions of whether photography was an art and what constituted the portrait began with photography's inception.⁸⁸ "Likeness" was said to simply enable one to recognize the subject photographed and "was associated almost entirely with physical attributes." While likeness was seen, consequently, as "a second-rate, superficial photograph," the "true" middle-class portrait "requires an 'inner likeness' as well as exterior representation." The portrait claimed to capture an interiority the likeness could not: "Exterior 'expressions,' namely, the physical contortions of the face, were said to register or reflect in the body's surface the 'character,' 'emotion,' 'mind,' 'disposition,' or 'soul' imagined to reside within the body's depths."⁸⁹ Through their own portraits, the white middle classes could assure themselves of their privileged interiority set in relief against the brute exteriority of photographic likenesses—the "rogues' gallery" and the eugenicist's or racist's "type." Not only would that interiority be captured and preserved in the portrait, but it could also be reassuringly possessed as the evidence of a middle-class success at "self-monitoring, self-possession, and self-control."⁹⁰ As Sekula has observed, the bourgeois social order "depends upon . . . 'possessive individualism'"⁹¹ as do, I contend, readings of Truth's portraits that claim they either capture her resistance or enable it.

Readings that suggest Truth either controlled this means of self-representation, or exerted a control over what her images would come to mean, argue that such possessive individualism is apparent to us in how Truth appears in portraits she would subsequently sell and copyright.⁹² This notion of her appearance as signalling a resistant interiority is, of course, all we have beyond

the caption Truth included on her *cartes* and cards: "I sell the shadow to support the substance."⁹³ Yet middle-class nineteenth-century Americans also had their response to the possibility that their portraits would either not be read favorably as divulging the interiority they "naturally" manifested, or that their interiority would depend upon the viewer and would not, consequently, be controlled by the sitter. The solution was to conceive of privileged interiority as equally the possession of the viewer and subject through regarding the portrait as appealing "by suggestion and abstraction to the imagination of the viewer, to his or her own interiorized essence." In this sense, interiority remained the possession of the middle class and was constantly reinforced in the viewing and exchange of portraits among them; as Smith argues, the subject and viewer "were posed on the same side of a divide that distinguished middle-class Americans, imbued with 'superior' interiority, from their cultural others."⁹⁴ Those others were believed unable to manifest an interiority they lacked, nor able to call it up within themselves as they viewed its manifestation in a photographic portrait. I argue that a similar conviction in one's knowledge of "self" as interiorized essence, a legacy of such visual codes, is evident in current scholarship on Truth's portraits.

There are, of course, compelling reasons to argue that Truth used photographic portraiture to access discourses of middle-class interiority, domesticity, and sentimentality. Not the least of these is the denial of interiority to African Americans through an extreme and often violent embodiment, or what Lindon Barrett has called a hyperbolic attention to the body: "[T]o be an African American or slave is to be foremost a body and to be fixed in a particular kind of space—a particular geography, but most especially the immediate space of one's own body."⁹⁵ We must remember that Sojourner Truth, clearly aware of photography as a possible tool of self-support, sought out portrait studios in both Detroit and Battle Creek. From the beginning, Truth endeavoured to sell her portraits, charging one dollar for three *cartes de visite*, thirty-five cents per *carte*, and fifty cents for her cabinet cards.⁹⁶ In that sense, it is important to stress that while the Columbia, South Carolina slaves could not choose or refuse to pose for Agassiz's evidentiary archive, Truth did choose to have her portraits made over a twenty-year period. And there were African Americans working with portrait photography in ways that arguably accessed and disrupted discourses of middle-class interiority and evidentiary typologies, the most well-known being W.E.B. Du Bois whose albums were displayed at the "American Negro" exhibit of the 1900 Paris Exposition.⁹⁷

It is important, however, to recognize the limits of arguing for Truth's repositioning within existing visual and cultural codes given that such a manoeuvre leaves, indeed depends upon leaving, these codes operative and reinforcing the racist discourses and social hierarchies that are asserted through them. While one could argue that Truth's resistance takes place in and through racialized visual codes, we need to remember these photographs are also an

embodiment of Truth at a time when “blackness” as embodiment or exteriority had long since reached hyperbole, when “[b]lackness, of course, conveyed its own messages.”⁹⁸ However much we want to believe that Truth might have strategized or controlled their composition and circulation, her portraits nonetheless participated in a culture of racial and social difference. Whatever means of communication these photographs offered Truth, they also circulated publicly. Their viewers formed an audience that, far from monolithic, varied in the readings and desires they brought to Truth’s *cartes* and cabinet cards. Consequently, Truth’s portraits were, and continue to be, open to what Karla Holloway calls the “public reconstruction of [private identities] . . . within the racial and gendered frames of American cultural history,”⁹⁹ frames that continue to read race through recourse to some visible corporeality.

That complex link, then, between bourgeois portraiture and evidentiary photography as practices of social discipline with particular investments in recording, and thereby securing, racial hierarchies must inform our reading of Sojourner Truth’s portraits and their possible circulation in mid-nineteenth-century American society. While it is clear that Truth had *cartes de visite* and cabinet cards made in order to sell them to support herself, any reading of her portraits as a resistant means of self-representation and communication must be informed by a critical understanding of photography’s use in the production, not simply the documentation, of racialized and classed identities. Claiming that some aspect of the “real” Truth can be discerned in her photographs is not only to endow her with an uncomplicated possessive individualism that was racialized and classed through photographic portraiture, but is also to endow the scholar as viewer with a similarly “superior” interiority to which her portraits speak. Instead, we must examine the investments in and meanings of visual codes within these photographic practices as problematic for our interpretation of Truth’s portraits. This may not bring us to definitive or unambiguous readings of her photographs, but we must be willing to consider that Truth may very well remain elusive in those photographs much as she does in fragments or representations of her speeches and life.

Notes

Many thanks to Judy Garber, Susan Hamilton, Lois Harder and Susan Smith for their helpful suggestions and generous critique of an earlier draft, and to Jacqueline Baker and Karen Engle for invaluable research assistance.

1. Kathleen Collins attributes this letter to Samuel Banks, Truth’s grandson and amanuensis. “Shadow and Substance: Sojourner Truth,” *History of Photography* 7.3 (July-September 1983): 190.

2. “Letter From Sojourner Truth,” *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 13 February 1864. Quite likely the sitting Truth is planning resulted in Figures 5 and 6, cabinet card and *carte-de-visite* versions that were subsequently reproduced by Randall, a Detroit photographer, and Frank Perry of Battle Creek, Michigan. Collins notes that both “James J. Randall and Croydon Chandler Randall, father and son, were early photographers” in Detroit, and that a “Randall, Photographer” is listed in the city directory at “220 Woodward Avenue.” Collins, “Shadow,” 189. Truth again used a letter to the editor to promote the sale of her photographs in the *NAAS* several months

later. Her letter dated 17 November 1864 from Freedman's Village, Virginia closes with: "Enclosed please find four shadows (cartes de visite). The two dollars came safely." "Letter From Sojourner Truth. The Story of her Interview with the President," *National Anti-Slavery Standard* 17 December 1864. Nearly twenty years later, Truth would note her photographs were still for sale in a letter to the editor of Chicago's *Daily Inter-Ocean*: "Many kind and encouraging letters have come to me from distant States, as well as orders for my books and photographs." "To the Editor of The Inter Ocean," *Chicago Daily Inter-Ocean*, 16 April 1881, reprinted in Suzanne Pullon Fitz and Roseann M. Mandziuk, *Sojourner Truth as Orator: Wit, Story, and Song* (Westport, Conn.: Greenwood Press, 1997), 201-02.

3. For detailed studies of Truth's life, work, and impact see Carleton Mabee with Susan Mabee Newhouse, *Sojourner Truth: Slave, Prophet, Legend* (New York: New York University Press, 1993) and Nell Irvin Painter, *Sojourner Truth: A Life, A Symbol* (New York: W.W. Norton, 1996).

4. "Letter From Sojourner Truth," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 13 February 1864.

5. Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, 216.

6. "Letter From Sojourner Truth," *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, 13 February 1864.

Truth is likely referring here to what will become the 1875 Boston edition of the *Narrative* she began to dictate to Olive Gilbert in 1844, and which was first published in Boston in 1850. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 103. The *Narrative* was later extended by Frances Titus and included her "Book of Life," containing newspaper accounts of her speeches, Harriet Beecher Stowe's "The Libyan Sibyl," correspondence, and "Autographs of Distinguished Persons" such as abolitionists William Lloyd Garrison, Wendell Phillips, Lucretia Mott, Lydia Maria Child, as well as President Lincoln. This version was published as *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; With a History of her Labors and Correspondence Drawn from Her "Book of Life"* in Battle Creek, Michigan, 1878. This text is now taken as the standard edition of the *Narrative* and is noted as jointly authored by Gilbert and Titus.

7. Cabinet cards were first introduced in England in 1866 and "in the United States before the end of the year. In this format the card measures 4½ X 6½ inches and the image 4 X 5½ inches, approximately three times the area of the carte [which measured 2½ inches X 3½ inches]." Cabinet card portraits were regarded as more attractive because of their "greater facial detail." William C. Darrah, *Cartes de Visite in Nineteenth-Century Photography* (Gettysburg: W.C. Darrah, 1981), 10.

8. Quoted in Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, 216.

9. Critical considerations of Truth's photographs are limited to Kathleen Collins's documentary article "Shadow and Substance: Sojourner Truth," and sections in Nell Irvin Painter's *Sojourner Truth* and Carla Peterson's "Doers of the Word."

10. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 198.

11. Nell Irvin Painter, "Representing Truth: Sojourner Truth's Knowing and Becoming Known." *The Journal of American History* 81 (September 1994): 462.

12. Carla L. Peterson, "Doers of the Word": *African-American Women Speakers and Writers in the North (1830-1880)* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 40.

13. *Ibid.*, 41.

14. Peterson, "Doers of the Word," 52. Carleton Mabee first raised such questions by comparing Gage's "Reminiscences" collected in *The History of Woman Suffrage* to accounts in papers like the *Anti-Slavery Bugle*. See Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, Chapter 6. Nell Painter also examines the differences between Gage's account and the *Bugle's* in *Sojourner Truth*; see Chapters 14 and 18. Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, 51-4.

15. Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 4.

16. While I will go on to consider these types of photography as intimately linked, let me here briefly distinguish between the two. Evidentiary photography was enlisted in the attempt to create a "scientific" catalogue of facial types through which physical features would be read as an index of intellectual and behavioral potential. The work of Francis Galton in England is one such example. Evidentiary photography was also used to document an individual's position within a social hierarchy, as did Louis Agassiz in the United States, who commissioned the photographic work of J.T. Zealy to prove his theory of the African "type." Bourgeois portraiture was a commercial photographic practice largely used by the middle and upper classes who could afford it and they used it to mark their social position, as John Tagg notes: "To have one's portrait done 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." John Tagg, *The Burden of Representation: Essays on Photographies and Histories* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1988), 37.

17. See, for example, the way Truth is presented at both the 1851 Akron convention and the 1867 AERA convention. Of interest is the way in which Truth is, no less the "type" of the slave after Emancipation. Frances Dana Gage, "Reminiscences"; "American Equal Rights

Association," *The History of Woman Suffrage*, eds. Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage org. 1881-1922, 6 vols, (repr. New York: Arno Press, 1969), II: 182-228; "Female Suffrage . . . Woman Demands Equality with the Negro," *New York World*, 10 May 1867; "Woman Suffrage. Proceedings of the Equal Rights Convention." *New York World*, 11 May 1867. This term, "Negro Exhibit," is Houston Baker's and one I shall return to and examine in more detail.

18. "Pro-Slavery in Indiana," *The Liberator*, 5 October 1858, reprinted in Olive Gilbert and Frances Titus, *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; a Bondswoman of Olden Time, with a History of her Labors and Correspondence Draw from her "Book of Life,"* 1878. *The Schomburg Library of Nineteenth-Century Black Women Writers*, ed. Henry Louis Gates, Jr (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 138.

19. *Ibid.*, 139.

20. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 141.

21. *Ibid.* Further accounts of her speeches indicate that her self-presentation as type may have included exaggerating her enslavement as forty rather than thirty years.

22. "Pro-Slavery," 138.

23. Gage, "Reminiscences," I:116.

24. For information on and readings of Story's statue see: Collins, "Shadow," 186-88; Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, 110-115; Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 153-160; Peterson, "Doers of the Word," 34-38; Jean Fagan Yellin, *Women and Sisters: The Antislavery Feminists in American Culture* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1989), 82-87.

25. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 130-31. Stowe's "puff" both attests to the authenticity of Truth's *Narrative* and lauds it as "more remarkable and interesting" than other slave narratives then in circulation. Quoted in Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 130. Stowe was, of course, famous by 1853 for writing *Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1851).

26. See Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 154-57; Peterson, "Doers of the Word," 31-38; Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 81-2.

27. Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, 69.

28. Harriet Beecher Stowe, "Sojourner Truth, The Libyan Sybil," *Narrative of Sojourner Truth*, 170, 171-2. While she doesn't contest Stowe's claim that her story of Truth inspired Story's statue, Yellin notes the statue's classical antecedents and observes that it was never "intended as a portrait of Sojourner Truth." Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 86; see also Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 82-7.

29. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 158.

30. Quoted in Yellin, *Women and Sisters*, 84.

31. Stowe, "Sojourner Truth, The Libyan Sybil," 151.

32. Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, 114-15.

33. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 198.

34. *Ibid.*

35. Collins, "Shadow," 200.

36. Darrah, *Cartes*, 48-53.

37. *Ibid.*, 19.

38. Suren Lalvani, *Photography, Vision, and the Production of Modern Bodies* (Albany: SUNY Press, 1996), 43.

39. Allan Sekula, "The Body and the Archive," *October* 39 (Winter 1986):10, 12.

40. *Ibid.*, 7. Sekula has in mind, and goes on to examine in detail, the criminal identification system of Alphonse Bertillon and the composite portraiture of Frances Galton. Both relied on the notion of the "average man" developed by Adolphe Quetelet, and pursued degrees of "deviance" from the average in order to type the "habitual" criminal, in Bertillon's case, and, for Galton, measure deviance from the "central type."

41. Barbara McCandless, "The Portrait Studio and the Celebrity," *Photography in Nineteenth-Century America*, ed. Martha A. Sandweiss (New York: Harry N. Abrams, 1991), 49. One of the first American photographers, Mathew Brady, produced an award-winning collection of daguerreotype portraits titled "Illustrious Americans" exhibited at the London Crystal Palace Exposition of 1851. He also circulated a sample of these "model Americans" in his book of lithographs, *Gallery of Illustrious Americans* (1850). Brady "explicitly contended" that these portraits would "provide salient examples of the American character for the praise and emulation of others." Smith, 165. See also Robert Taft, *Photography and the American Scene: A Social History, 1839-1889* (New York: Macmillan, 1938), chapters 3 and 4.

42. Lalvani, *Photography*, 66.

43. Smith, *American Archives*, 92.

44. While Galton's composites and theories were popular in America, I think it important to consider what images of African Americans were being produced in the United States at the time and how they may have been put to use. Both Harryette Mullen and Nell Painter have implicitly suggested a connection between Zealy's photographs and Truth's portraits, but have not pursued its implications for reading her photographs. See Mullen's "'Indecicate Subjects';

African American Women's Subjugated Subjectivity" in *Sub/versions: Feminist Studies* (Santa Cruz: University of California Press, 1991), 1-7; and Painter's *Sojourner Truth*, 196-97. Agassiz studied with George Cuvier, and emigrated to the United States from Switzerland in 1846 to join the faculty at Harvard University. He was one of the leading polygenesists of his day, and was influenced by Samuel Morton's craniometry and ethnographic research. Agassiz seems to have determined the composition of these daguerreotypes. In 1865 he had very similar photographs taken of "interracial offspring he encountered in Manaos," Brazil on his Thayer expedition. Agassiz had "one of his students," Walter Hunnewell, "train in photography" and "set up a photographic studio" where he photographed some forty to fifty men and women. Gwyniera Isaac, "Louis Agassiz's Photographs in Brazil," *History of Photography* 21 (Spring 1997): 5-6. Like Zealy's daguerreotypes, Hunnewell's photographs for Agassiz consisted of front, profile and back views of subjects who were fully or partially nude.

45. Brian Wallis, "Black Bodies, White Science: Louis Agassiz's Slave Daguerreotypes," *American Art* 9 (Summer 1995):45-6.

46. *Ibid.*, 45.

47. *Ibid.*, 49.

48. There seem to have been two images of the escaped slave, Gordon, circulating as *cartes* titled *The Scourged Back*. The original photographs were taken by New Orleans photographers McPherson and Oliver, who "were taking pictures of the Union encampments at Baton Rouge in the early months of 1863." Dr. S.K. Towle, a surgeon with the 30th Massachusetts Regiment, "may have been the medical officer who examined Gordon" and "sent a photograph" of his scarred back to the Surgeon-General of the State of Massachusetts. McAllister and Brothers in Philadelphia reproduced this photograph as a *carte*, which then "came to be circulated among abolitionists in the North." Kathleen Collins, "The Scourged Back," *History of Photography* 9 (January-March 1985): 43, 44. In both *cartes* the subject is positioned in the same way, though in one he wears a beard, while in the other his hair is shorter and the beard has been shaved. In its 4 July 1863 issue, *Harper's Weekly* published a woodcut of the photograph titled "Gordon Under Medical Inspection," accompanying the editorial "A typical Negro." Marcus Wood has traced this woodcut to a subsequent 1864 publication in England, "on a broadside entitled *Southern Slavery Illustrated* and addressed to the Working Men of Manchester." Marcus Wood, *Blind Memory: Visual Representations of Slavery in England and America, 1780-1865* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 269-70. Kathleen Collins has also documented a "Scourged Back" *carte* "issued by a British publisher" among the Henry Ward Beecher Papers, and surmises that Beecher brought the *carte* back from his 1863 anti-slavery lecture campaign in Britain. This *carte* was titled "The 'Peculiar Institution' Illustrated" and produced by "Fred. Jones, Photo." of London. Collins, "Scourged," 44-45.

49. Houston A. Baker, Jr. *Workings of the Spirit: The Poetics of Afro-American Women's Writing* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 13.

50. Wallis, "Black Bodies," 49.

51. Collins, "Shadow," 193-4.

52. *Ibid.*, 193.

53. "Women's Loyal National League," *New York World*, 25 July 1864, reprinted in *The History of Woman Suffrage*, II: 898. The League's petition was designed to urge the House and Congress to pass the Emancipation bill before it, even if that entailed amending the Constitution. The League aimed to present this petition "signed by one million women and upward." "Vast Enterprise Proposed by Women," *The New York Tribune*, reprinted in *The History of Woman Suffrage*, II:893. As Painter notes, the photograph of the scarred "Louisiana slave" would have been the *Scourged Back carte*. *Sojourner Truth*, 187.

54. Lalvani, *Photography*, 48, 52.

55. Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 36.

56. *Ibid.*, 50.

57. Lalvani, *Photography*, 52.

58. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 196. For examples of bourgeois portraits of African Americans at mid-century, see: Valencia Hollins Coar, *A Century of Black Photographers: 1840-1960* (Providence: Museum of Art, Rhode Island School of Design, 1983); Jezierski, *Enterprising Images*; Deborah Willis, *Reflections in Black: A History of Black Photographers, 1840 to the Present* (New York: W.W. Norton, 2000); Jackie Napoleon Wilson, *Hidden Witness: African-American Images from the Birth of Photography to the Civil War* (New York: St Martin's, 1999). Douglas Henry Daniels, "Visual Documents and Race Relations," *Journal of Ethnic Studies* 7 (Winter 1980), 14.

59. Daniels, "Visual Documents," 17.

60. *Ibid.*, 189.

61. Collins, "Shadow," 189.

62. Daniels notes that contemporary African American "informants" read such portraits as an indication of nineteenth-century African Americans' civility: "It's good to know they were

so civilized.” Daniels, “Visual Documents,” 17. Truth’s photographs were largely purchased by white abolitionists in whose circles she traveled and worked. Collins documents the purchase of her photos by Anna Dickinson, Walter Brown (Lucretia Mott’s brother-in-law), and George Thompson. Collins, “Shadow,” 199.

63. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 187; Peterson, “*Doers of the Word*,” 41.

64. John Vincent Jerzierski, *Enterprising Images: The Goodridge Brothers, African American Photographers, 1847-1922* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2000), 70. See also Kathleen L. Miller, “The Cabinet Card Photograph: Relic of a Gilded Age,” *Journal of the West* 28 (Winter 1989): 29-31.

65. Laurence Senelick, “Melodramatic Gesture in Carte-de-Visite Photographs,” *Theater* 18 (Summer 1987): 5.

66. Quoted in Taft, *Photography and the American Scene*, 321-22. Kurtz was a New York photographer.

67. Wallis, “Black Bodies,” 54.

68. Quoted in Darrah, *Cartes*, 24. See Oliver Wendell Holmes, “The Stereoscope and the Stereograph,” *Atlantic Monthly* 3 (June 1859).

69. Laura Wexler, *Tender Violence: Domestic Visions in an Age of U.S. Imperialism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2000), 65.

70. Karen Sanchez-Eppler, “Bodily Bonds: The Intersecting Rhetorics of Feminism and Abolition,” *Representations* 24 (Fall 1988): 35, 36.

71. Wexler, *Tender Violence*, 65, 66.

72. *Ibid.*, 65-66, 66, 68.

73. *Ibid.*, 87. Wexler also offers several readings of such portraits that see the nursemaid and her portrait as more “threatening” to middle-class whiteness and its policed boundaries. *Ibid.*, 83-89.

74. Since African American photographers like the Goodridges, though few, were photographing both black and white sitters in their studios from 1847 (Glenalvin Goodridge in York, Pennsylvania) through the early 1920s (Wallace and William Goodridge in Michigan’s Saginaw Valley), this is a possibility. See Jerzierski’s *Enterprising Images*.

75. Wexler, *Tender Violence*, 66.

76. Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine’s Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992), 7.

77. Wallis, “Black Bodies,” 54.

78. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 198-99.

79. In noting that Truth “often spoke in churches,” Carleton Mabee documents that from 1850 onwards, Truth delivered “101 . . . [lectures in] churches (most of them white), 70 in public halls, and 38 in such other places as schools, courthouses, or outdoors.” Mabee, *Sojourner Truth*, 235. Of course, we are dependant upon extant records, primarily letters and newspaper reports, and such records are far more complete for white organizations and individuals than for their African American counterparts, a point Mabee notes. There are, however, two interesting reports in the New York *Tribune* of speeches Truth delivered in the fall of 1853 to two New York City churches with African American congregations: “the First Congregational Church in Sixth st. between 3rd and 4th avs” on the evening of September 6th, and a “church in Anthony st.” on the evening of November 7th. “Address by a Slave Mother,” New York *Tribune* 7 September 1853, reprinted in Erlene Stetson and Linda David, *Glorying in Tribulation: The Lifework of Sojourner Truth*, (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 1994), 207-09; “Lecture by Sojourner Truth,” New York *Tribune*, 8 November 1853, reprinted in Stetson and David, 209-11. At the latter speech Truth “did a considerable business in the way of selling the first part of her life, done up in some 120 pages . . . to support the remainder.” “Lecture.” Clearly African Americans who heard her speak were interested in supporting her work.

80. Collins, “Shadow,” 199.

81. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 196.

82. Peterson, “*Doers of the Word*,” 42.

83. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 187.

84. Wexler, *Tender Violence*, 67.

85. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 196.

86. Peterson, “*Doers of the Word*,” 44.

87. Tagg, *Burden of Representation*, 37.

88. Smith, *American Archives*, 56-7.

89. *Ibid.*, 56, 55.

90. Wexler, *Tender Violence*, 66. I am transposing Wexler’s comments on sentimental fiction to its visual counterpart.

91. Sekula, “Body and the Archive,” 7.

92. For example, Peterson argues: “In agreeing to have photographic images made of herself, Truth insisted on maintaining control over them by having them copyrighted in her own

name and selling them on her own terms at profit." Peterson, "*Doers of the Word*," 41. This may well have been Truth's intent, however, copyrighting her images would have protected her little against their piracy and her lost income as a result, as Darrah documents: "The ease with which copy negatives could be made . . . inevitably encouraged piracy of virtually every image having profit potential. Copyright (United States), registry (Great Britain) and depose (France) granted a claim or right to a photographic publisher, with recourse to legal action for violation, but there was little actual protection." Moreover, there seems to have been little ethical prohibition against piracy either: "Some of the most respected photographers [like Brady], pirated images. . . . [and] did not hesitate to place their own imprints on them." Darrah, *Cartes*, 18.

93. See Peterson for a brief reading of that phrase, "I sell the shadow to support the substance" within her larger argument that Truth's photographs enabled her "resistance to commodification." Peterson, "*Doers of the Word*," 44.

94. Smith, *American Archives*, 60, 61.

95. Lindon Barrett, "African-American Slave Narratives: Literacy, the Body, Authority," *American Literary History* 7 (Fall 1995):424.

96. Peterson, "*Doers of the Word*," 41; Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 198.

97. See David Levering Lewis and Deborah Willis (eds), *A Small Nation of People: W.E.B. Du Bois and African American Portraits of Progress* (New York: Amistad Press, 2003); Shawn Michelle Smith, *American Archives* and "Looking at One's Self Through the Eyes of Others": W.E.B. Du Bois's Photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition," *African American Review* 34 (Winter 2000): 581-99.

98. Painter, *Sojourner Truth*, 196.

99. Karla F.C. Holloway, "The Body Politic." *Subjects and Citizens: Nation, Race, and Gender from Oroonoko to Anita Hill*, eds. Michael Moon and Cathy N. Davidson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 484.