

## INTRODUCTION



# Photography on the Color Line

Looking back over an extraordinarily long and distinguished career, W. E. B. Du Bois would remember: “At the beginning of the twentieth century, when I was but ten years out of college, I visited the Paris Exposition of 1900. It was one of the finest, perhaps the very finest, of world expositions. . . . I had brought with me, as excuse for coming, a little display showing the development of Negroes in the United States, which gained a gold medal.”<sup>1</sup> Despite his somewhat modest account, Du Bois’s participation in the American Negro Exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition marked a formative moment in his early intellectual life. The Paris Exposition launched Du Bois into national and international recognition as an African American scholar and a leader in the emerging field of sociology.<sup>2</sup> Further, Du Bois introduced one of his “little displays” with what would become his most prophetic pronouncement: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.” At the Paris Exposition, Du Bois declared that “race” would prove the defining and most fundamental problem of the age, and his own work from that period has shaped critical thinking about race for the past century.

Du Bois’s predictions about the color line continue to resonate in the current historical moment, but some of the important nuances of his original understanding of the color line have been lost to us over the hundred years since his first articulation. This book aims to recover the *visual* meanings of the color line, to excavate from Du Bois’s initial conception the visual theater of racist projection and inscription, as well as antiracist resistance, which, for Du Bois, structures the process of racial identification. While scholars have productively employed the material meaning of the color line as the marker of social and economic divides engendered by slavery, segregation, colo-

nialism, and imperialism, they have largely left untapped the conceptual meaning of the color line as a nexus of competing gazes in which racialization is understood as the effect of both intense scrutiny and obfuscation under a white supremacist gaze. It is this latter sense of the color line that this book teases out and deciphers, an understanding that I bring into focus largely through a reading of the remarkable collection of photographs Du Bois compiled for the 1900 Paris Exposition.

In *Photography on the Color Line*, I argue that the 363 photographs Du Bois procured for the American Negro Exhibit collectively function as a counterarchive that challenges a long legacy of racist taxonomy, intervening in turn-of-the-century “race science” by offering competing visual evidence.<sup>3</sup> But the photographs themselves do not simply or transparently offer up such a reading. Indeed, Du Bois’s archive is almost impossibly enigmatic, and, at first, intractable. Unlike other photographic displays included in the American Negro Exhibit, Du Bois’s Georgia Negro albums do not offer an explanatory text; the photographs do not have captions. The albums present hundreds of photographs of unnamed individuals, unmarked buildings, unlocated streets, and vacant fields. In part, the very interpretive challenge of these images captured and held my attention, compelling me to theorize ways to approach an archive that gives one very little help in deciphering its meaning. I found the Georgia Negro albums especially provocative, for while the message they contain is impenetrable to contemporary viewers, in 1900, an international jury awarded Du Bois a gold medal in part for these images and the cultural work they performed. In other words, what remains obscure today was apparently self-evident in 1900; the images themselves, without captions or an introductory text, performed recognizable cultural work at the turn of the century. It is thus my task here to make these images comprehensible once again for a contemporary audience, to recover their lost meaning, and to revitalize them as an antiracist visual archive by restoring a signifying context that makes the images readable and their critical cultural work intelligible.

To do so, I argue first that Du Bois himself was an early *visual* theorist of race and racism. The 1900 photographs call attention to the visual nexus of understanding and imagery that underpins some of Du Bois’s most influential written work on race at the turn of the century, underscoring the visual paradigms that inform “double-

consciousness,” “the Veil,” and “second-sight.” Du Bois aimed not simply to challenge “racist images” but also to reconfigure the racialized structures of the gaze through which he suggested race was formulated and racial identification negotiated.

Second, I propose a critically comparative interpretive visual methodology, which reads visual archives against one another to find photographic meaning in the interstices between them, in the challenges they pose to one another, and in the competing claims they make on cultural import. Drawing from Du Bois’s insights, this methodology opens up ways for contemporary scholars to understand the multivalenced critical cultural work that photographic images, and photographic archives, perform. Thus *Photography on the Color Line* not only offers a critical assessment and recovery of Du Bois’s visual practice and theory but also an exercise in visual cultural analysis, one that seeks to make the photographic archive resonate with all its cultural and historical significance.

This book demonstrates that visual culture was fundamental not only to racist classification but also to racial reinscription and the reconstruction of racial knowledge in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. My reading of Du Bois’s photographs shows how contested, mutable, and flexible visual culture has been as a site through which race is posed and challenged. *Photography on the Color Line* models a critical methodology that sees race as fundamental to and defined by visual culture, that understands race and visual culture to be mutually constitutive, and that reads photographic archives as racialized sites invested in laying claim to contested cultural meanings.

### Du Bois’s Georgia Negro Exhibit

For the 1900 Paris Exposition, Du Bois organized 363 photographs into three albums, entitled *Types of American Negroes, Georgia, U.S.A.* (volumes 1–3), and *Negro Life in Georgia, U.S.A.* The albums constituted part of Du Bois’s larger Georgia Negro Exhibit,<sup>4</sup> which he produced at Atlanta University in collaboration with students and recent graduates.<sup>5</sup> Roughly modeled on his groundbreaking work *The Philadelphia Negro*, Du Bois’s Georgia Negro Exhibit was designed to show “what the negro really is in the South,”<sup>6</sup> and it included, in addi-

tion to the photographs studied here, a series of charts and graphs documenting the social and economic status of African Americans,<sup>7</sup> maps depicting the African American population of various Georgia counties, and a multivolume set containing all the Georgia state laws pertaining to African Americans from 1732 to 1899.<sup>8</sup> The studies were highly regarded, and, as noted earlier, Paris Exposition judges awarded Du Bois a prestigious gold medal for his work as “compiler of [the] Georgia Negro Exhibit.”<sup>9</sup>

Du Bois’s Georgia Negro albums are large horizontal folios filled with images rendered in the soft warm tones of albumen paper prints.<sup>10</sup> Almost two-thirds of the photographs are portraits, generally paired on a page, and they typically offer two views of an individual, one frontal, the other in varying degrees of profile.<sup>11</sup> The remaining photographs depict domestic interiors, homes, businesses, churches, rural scenes, street scenes, group portraits, and an occasional single portrait.<sup>12</sup> The now decaying leather bindings on the albums present title, volume number, and the words *Du Bois* in gold-leaf lettering.<sup>13</sup>

Beyond the simple denotation of title and compiler, the albums offer viewers little in the way of directive cues. Individuals and places represented remain unnamed, except as being from “Georgia, U.S.A.”; photographers are not credited; and no methodology is discussed. Once again, the images have no captions. Only after seeing one of the Georgia Negro photographs reproduced in Deborah Willis’s groundbreaking *Reflections in Black*, there attributed to Thomas E. Askew, Atlanta’s first African American photographer, was I able to recover, reading across several Atlanta archives, other portraits made by Askew also included in the Du Bois albums. Finally, a signature lace curtain and tapestry linked even more of the images to Askew. I have thus discovered that Thomas E. Askew produced many of the studio portraits for Du Bois’s Georgia Negro albums, including one of the most striking images in the collection, which depicts his sons in the Summit Avenue Ensemble (plate 14).<sup>14</sup> I have also discerned that Askew himself is represented in one of the photographs (figure 1),<sup>15</sup> and portraits taken by him include those of Henry Hugh Proctor, minister of the First Congregational Church of Atlanta (figures 27 and 28),<sup>16</sup> Mamie Westmorland, a schoolteacher (figure 29), and her stepdaughter, Ernestine Bell,<sup>17</sup> as well as group portraits of families posed outside their lovely homes (plate 22).<sup>18</sup>



1. Thomas E. Askew, photographer, Atlanta, Georgia. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Types of American Negroes, Georgia, U.S.A.* (1900), vol. 3, no. 201. Reproduced from the Daniel Murray Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



2. Henry A. Rucker, internal revenue collector, Atlanta, Georgia. Active in the Niagara Movement and the NAACP. W. E. B. Du Bois, *Negro Life in Georgia, U.S.A.* (1900), no. 281. Reproduced from the Daniel Murray Collection, Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Not surprisingly, many of the photographs in the Georgia Negro albums present scenes and people from Atlanta, Du Bois's home at the turn of the century. At least two churches are represented,<sup>19</sup> and prominent Atlantans include David Tobias Howard, an undertaker, photographed in his carriage with his mother and wife (plate 23),<sup>20</sup> and Henry A. Rucker, an Internal Revenue collector, photographed in his large office at his imposing desk (figure 2).<sup>21</sup> I have identified one of the young women represented in the initial series of portraits as Bazoline Estelle Usher, a student at Atlanta University from 1899 to 1906 (plate 4),<sup>22</sup> and it is almost certain that similar portraits also depict Atlanta University students. While a small number of the images in Du Bois's collection present rural scenes, including a few of men and women farming (plate 19), and one of a small group of men seated together on a rustic front porch, by and large they represent a well-to-do urban population, Du Bois's "Talented Tenth" of "influential and forceful men,"<sup>23</sup> and the educated youth who will replace and surpass them.

While residents of Georgia might have recognized some of the places and people in Du Bois's albums, a larger national and international audience would not have had the benefit of such visual clues. Those first viewers would have seen the albums as they remain today, without captions or credits. They would have been left simply to follow the images themselves, to read the visual narrative pasted in place in Du Bois's albums, and perhaps to heed the one public statement Du Bois himself made concerning the photographs, namely, that visitors to the American Negro Exhibit would find "several volumes of photographs of typical Negro faces, which hardly square with conventional American ideas."<sup>24</sup>

If Du Bois conceived his Georgia Negro photographs as contestatory images, as representations that challenged "conventional American ideas," then it is important to read them against the racist "conventions" of U.S. visual culture in order to understand fully the resistant nature of Du Bois's visual project. This book offers such a critical inroad by considering Du Bois's photographs in relation to scientific, institutional, and sensational photographic archives intent on defining racial identities and reinforcing racial hierarchies at the turn of the century. Du Bois's Georgia Negro photographs signified in a cultural context dominated by scientific racism, racial segregation, and lynching. As we shall see, the photographs challenge the distortions of mug

shots made to uphold scientific discourses of “Negro inferiority” and “Negro criminality,” and they proclaim an African American presence in the face of the spectacular erasures produced by lynching.

### Albums as Counterarchive

Du Bois’s photographs for the American Negro Exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition evoke multiple codes of photographic meaning. As my analysis in subsequent chapters will show, the images formally resemble a wide range of disparate kinds of photographs, from the instrumental records of scientific and criminological mug shots to middle-class portraits. Given this diversity in genre and the paucity of explanatory information provided by the albums, the photograph collection demands a creative investigatory framework—one that critically compares archives, and one that might be adapted to assess the many different kinds of photographs that exist without ancillary documentation.

Despite the fact that his name is embossed on the album spines, Du Bois does not emerge as the “author” of the Georgia Negro photographs in any simple way. Once again, Thomas E. Askew made at least some of the photographs, and there is no evidence suggesting that Du Bois ever used a camera himself. And yet, Du Bois is clearly marked as the framer and organizer of the images—it is his name on the spine of the albums, and it is Du Bois who was awarded a gold medal for this work. Thus, if Du Bois does not exactly function as an author in this case, he is certainly an *archivist*—an assembler of already prepared parts, making meaning by choosing and placing and pasting images in relation to one another.

An archive circumscribes and delimits the meaning of the photographs that comprise it, investing images with import calculated to confirm a particular discourse. Even as it purports simply to supply evidence, or to document historical occurrences, the archive maps the cultural terrain it claims to describe. In other words, the archive constructs the knowledge it would seem only to register or make evident. Thus archives are ideological; they are conceived with political intent, to make specific claims on cultural meaning. Archivists choose certain images while excluding others, and by comparing contemporary archives, one can decipher the range of imaging options available at a

particular moment, and thus begin to interpret the significance of the choices an archivist has made. Because archives claim contested signifying terrain, they proclaim importance in strained relation to one another, and often the stakes involved in the cultural work that visual archives perform are very high. For example, at the turn of the century, the meaning of race, as visually codified, registered one's claims to social and legal justice, economic opportunity, political rights, and even basic human rights, including one's very survival. Photographic archives defining race supported, or, in Du Bois's case, aimed to dismantle, the racial hierarchies that fundamentally informed legal and scientific knowledge around 1900.

Once an archive is compiled, it makes a claim on history; it exists as a record of the past. The archive is a vehicle of memory, and as it becomes the trace on which an historical record is founded, it makes some people, places, things, ideas, and events visible, while relegating others, through its signifying absences, to invisibility. In this sense, then, archives have an ideological function not only in the moment of their inception but also across time, for they determine in large part what will be collectively remembered and how it will be remembered. Thus, at the most basic level, Du Bois's archive (and its recovery) resists the erasure of African Americans from the national historical record, redressing the distortions and violence of racist caricature and scientific typology. But as Du Bois's Georgia Negro photographs make clear, with the passing of time, an archive's specific import can also become obscured; its particular engagement of historical debates can be lost. To recover the original power of an archive, one must aim to restore the cultural contexts of its originary moment by reading it in relation to the other archives it first engaged. This book thus addresses the general problem of how the archive signifies over time by endeavoring to recover the contexts that illuminate the cultural work Du Bois's specific archive performed at the moment of its inception, reconstructing its historical resonance and restoring its first meaning to provide a basis on which this archive can continue to produce new meanings for our own time.

In his foundational essay, "The Body and the Archive," Allan Sekula suggests that "the archive became the dominant institutional basis for photographic meaning" between 1880 and 1910.<sup>25</sup> He argues that the institutional archive produced photographs (and bodies) as transparent, equivalent, exchangeable texts organized according to an over-

riding ideological surveillance invested in constructing middle-class norms against criminal deviance. According to Sekula, the popular middle-class portrait and the institutional criminal mug shot have always been integrally intertwined, the police repository serving as the limit that defines the bounds of middle-class self-possession.<sup>26</sup> And yet, Du Bois's archive troubles that oppositional mutual reinforcement by subtly demonstrating how hard an emergent black bourgeoisie had to fight the racist imagery meant to inscribe and contain the black body in criminal archives. Not everyone had equal access to privileged middle-class representations, and certainly part of Du Bois's project at the turn of the century was to reject the white-wash of normative middle-class archives, claiming a space for African Americans within the middle classes.

With his Georgia Negro albums, Du Bois produces a counter-archive that reconfigures the contours of institutional knowledge, refocusing photographic meaning and visual identification out from the archival margin, shifting the apex of normalcy to rest squarely on an African American middle class. Du Bois's photograph collection intervenes in dominant ways of knowing and representing race, reenvisioning a culturally authorized visual record's codification of racial information. Du Bois grounds African American identity in a contestatory archive, offering a place from which a counter-history can be imagined and narrated, and, as a counterarchive, Du Bois's Georgia Negro albums underscore the ways in which both identity and history are founded, at least partially, through representation. 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. Du Bois's counterarchive specifically highlights the racialized contours of "official" photographic meaning and scientific knowledge, precisely as it challenges such authorized claims to truth.

Du Bois's Georgia Negro images signify in critical relation to, and "*signify on*," the scientific, eugenicist, and criminological archives that attempted to proclaim African American inferiority at the turn of the century.<sup>27</sup> The albums trouble the normative, assumed transparency of authorized institutional knowledge. But Du Bois's albums employ other visual tactics as well; they also reproduce the sentimental and commodified forms of the middle-class portrait to contest the conflation of African Americans under the visual signs of crimi-

nality or biological inferiority. As bell hooks has argued, the ubiquitous snapshot can become a site of resistance and reorientation: “The camera was the central instrument by which blacks could disprove representations of us created by white folks.”<sup>28</sup> Indeed, the nineteenth-century counterparts to the later snapshots that hooks examines—those myriad popular forms Geoffrey Batchen has called “vernacular photographs”<sup>29</sup>—rivalled institutional archives as pre-eminent cultural sites producing photographic meaning throughout the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It is, in part, the personal photograph that Du Bois wields in order to challenge and undermine dominant institutional archives of racialized photographic meaning. Indeed, Du Bois’s albums subtly recall that most sentimental of cultural forms, the family photograph album.<sup>30</sup>

Du Bois’s archive does explicitly what all collections of photographs do implicitly, namely, signify in relation to other archives. Each photograph enters a visual terrain that has been mapped and codified by other photographs, in the service of competing discourses. One recognizes a photograph and deciphers its various meanings by posing it (consciously or not) in relation to other photographs. Each photograph negotiates not only the past of its split-second historical referent but also a photographic past of other images. But this is not to say that the relative relation of one photographic archive to another remains neutral: once again, the stakes in the production of archival knowledge are very high, for particular photographic forms, placed in specific collections, are utilized to support state disciplinary technologies. For example, today, paired frontal and hard profile head shots—the “mug shots” of early anthropologists, criminologists, biological racialists, and eugenicists—are nearly impossible to read outside of a long legacy of instrumental function and identification; they cannot signify neutrally.

Particular photographic meanings depend on a viewer experienced in reading culturally specific visual histories. Visual perception is mapped by a web of intersecting gazes, some sanctioned, others denied, their visions, even of self, obscured. Du Bois’s Georgia Negro photographs demonstrate how the codifications of the color line instruct viewers to see race in specific ways, and they simultaneously work to retrain viewers. My own reading of the photographs, and of Du Bois’s resistant visual project, demonstrates how race and visual culture have been mutually constituted in the United States. By this

I mean to suggest that the problem of the color line is much more fundamental than the problem of racist representation, which is itself immense. Indeed, visual archives reinforce the racialized cultural prerogatives of the gaze, which determine who is authorized to look, and what will be seen, such that looking itself is a racial act, and being looked at has racial effects. Archives train, support, and disrupt racialized gazes, infusing race into the very structures of how we see and what we know. However, by arguing that race is conceived not simply through representation but also through acts of looking, I do not mean to reinforce a literal notion of “color”; instead, I wish to emphasize the ways in which racial identification and recognition are negotiated through, and even instigated by, racialized gazes in a racist culture.

Beginning here with the site of the American Negro Exhibit, its history and place within the 1900 Paris Exposition, and moving from this point to the wider context of a history of representations of race in subsequent chapters, I am interested in how Du Bois’s images evoke and contest the “authorizing discourses” that enable viewing.<sup>31</sup> Du Bois’s Georgia Negro photographs refuse the fiction of “the disengaged look of universal man,”<sup>32</sup> challenging the continued authorization of a white gaze; indeed, such disruptions of a racialized normative gaze are central to the ways in which the images function as a counterarchive. Du Bois’s photographs engage viewers that occupy particular historical and cultural positions, and they work to dismantle and reconfigure the popular and scientific visual genealogies of African Americans that inform dominant turn-of-the-century viewing practices. If the viewer, at least in part, produces photographic meaning, Du Bois’s albums suggest that the viewer can also be directed to look and see differently.

Signifying between instrumental archives and sentimental albums, Du Bois’s photographs suggest that representations and viewing are both determined and determining forces. The middle-class portrait presupposes the emotional labor of an invested viewer,<sup>33</sup> and with his albums, Du Bois could use that affective force as a critical wedge against racist interpretation. By combining and juxtaposing objectifying photographs with images that evoke a sentimental register, Du Bois reminds viewers that institutional archives cannot contain individuals, nor univocally determine photographic meaning. Identification is the effect not only of an institutionally authorized sur-

veillance but also of self-inscription, performance, and posing for a sympathetic viewer. Personal archives, with their quotidian images, always compete with institutional archives over the foundations of knowledge. Indeed, Du Bois's albums, as counterarchive, suggest that photographic meaning, and even identity itself, is situated somewhere between the institutional and the vernacular, between determination and agency, between the archive and the album.

### Displaying Race at the 1900 Paris Exposition

The 1900 American Negro Exhibit was a relatively new kind of exhibition, representing African American achievements for an international audience. While so-called Colored Departments were created to oversee displays organized by African Americans for world's fairs as early as 1885,<sup>34</sup> separate exhibits showcasing African American works were inaugurated most conspicuously in 1895, with the Negro Building at the Atlanta Cotton States and International Exposition.<sup>35</sup> Two years after African Americans were denied official participation in the 1893 Chicago Columbian World's Exposition, they were invited to present their cultural achievements and industrial innovations to the world at the Atlanta Exposition of 1895, and again at the Tennessee Centennial Exposition of 1897. Following in this new tradition, and at the encouragement of Booker T. Washington and W. E. B. Du Bois, the U.S. commissioner-general, Ferdinand W. Peck, invited Thomas Junius Calloway to oversee the production of an American Negro Exhibit for the Paris Exposition of 1900.<sup>36</sup> Calloway's exhibit would win the highest honor, a Grand Prix, from Paris Exposition judges,<sup>37</sup> and from Paris it would travel to Buffalo, New York—to be included in the 1901 Pan-American Exposition—and then to Charleston, South Carolina—to be included in the 1901–2 South Carolina Interstate and West Indian Exposition—before finally being stored at the Library of Congress.<sup>38</sup>

In Paris, the American Negro Exhibit was housed within the Palace of Social Economy, a wooden structure built in the style of Louis XVI. It was situated next to the Palace of Horticulture, on the banks of the Seine, across from the national buildings of European and North American countries.<sup>39</sup> In addition to the exhibits Du Bois prepared from Georgia, the American Negro Exhibit included a large



3. The American Negro Exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition. Reproduced from the collections of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

portrait of Booker T. Washington, hanging over the exhibit; portraits of B. K. Bruce, U.S. senator from Mississippi, and Judson W. Lyons, registrar of the Treasury; a bronze statuette of Frederick Douglass;<sup>40</sup> photographs, reports, and artifacts from Hampton and Tuskegee Institutes, as well as from Fisk University; exhibits showing the work of professional schools at Howard and Atlanta Universities; a display devoted to African American Medal of Honor men; four volumes containing the official patent sheets issued to nearly four hundred African Americans; and two hundred texts from Daniel Murray's extensive collection of African American literary works.<sup>41</sup> Within the Palace of Social Economy, the American Negro Exhibit was joined by other U.S. exhibits, including models of tenement houses, maps of industrial plants, and the work of factory inspectors, as well as displays from other countries, including the state insurance of Germany, the mutual aid societies of France, and the international Red Cross Society.<sup>42</sup>

Situated within the Palace of Social Economy, and thereby rooted

in the modern “science of society,” the American Negro Exhibit participated ideologically in the celebration of Western European “civilization” and “progress.” Further, as one of the most “scientific” of the exhibits within the Palace of Social Economy,<sup>43</sup> the American Negro Exhibit claimed a place at the forefront of a Western advance, offering evidence of African American ability and leadership. The exhibit emblemized Du Bois’s then strong “faith in the power of empirical sociology,”<sup>44</sup> in the power of “empirical investigation, the statistical method, [and] unbiased evaluation” to bring about social change.<sup>45</sup> However, the American Negro Exhibit’s narrative of progress and success was also easily appropriated for varied, and even contradictory, purposes. Placed beside model tenement houses and mutual aid societies, it was posed as a “solution” to a social problem, as a remedy, undoubtedly, to what Du Bois decried as the “half-named” American “Negro problem.”<sup>46</sup>

Within the larger context of the 1900 Paris Exposition as a whole, the American Negro Exhibit existed in complicated relation to other racialized displays. In one sense, it clearly contested the racialized evolutionary scale on which so-called native village exhibits were founded. Such exhibits, prominent at international expositions from 1889 to 1914, helped to popularize white supremacist scientific theories of evolution and human development.<sup>47</sup> At the turn of the century, people from all over the world, and particularly from European colonies, were brought to international expositions to construct, and then to live in, “native villages.”<sup>48</sup> Arranged around the outskirts of European centers celebrating Western industrial progress, the native villages served to display exotic otherness, to showcase imperial spoils. These exhibits functioned both as entertainment and education, and anthropologists in France and the United States saw them as important means for furthering ethnological study.<sup>49</sup> Feeding a fantasy of white supremacist evolutionary theory, the native villages proposed to offer (white) Westerners a glimpse “back,” down a “sliding scale of humanity,” toward a “primitive” past of savagery. At many of the world’s fairs, the geographical layout of buildings and exhibits was designed explicitly to reproduce this fantasy: Visitors to the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition were encouraged to walk through the Midway, with its native villages, toward the center of the fair, marked by its literally white, Greco-Roman buildings, displaying the latest European and North American scientific and cultural achievements.<sup>50</sup>



4. Stereograph, Keystone View Company. Trocadéro entrance to the exposition, Colonial Section in foreground, Paris, 1900. Reproduced from the collections of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

The “scientific” displays that drew evolutionary “evidence” of primitive savagery from the colonies ideologically reinforced, in turn, the virtues of European conquest, American imperialism, and racial segregation. In France, according to Paul Greenhalgh, such exhibits “‘revealed’ the apparently degenerate state the conquered peoples lived in, making the conquest not only more acceptable but necessary for their moral rescue.”<sup>51</sup> In the United States, according to Robert Rydell, “these hierarchical displays of race and culture” suggested that “seemingly backward ‘types’ of humanity, including blacks, could legitimately be treated as wards of the factory and field until an indeterminate evolutionary period rendered them either civilized or extinct.”<sup>52</sup> The native village exhibits situated peoples of color outside of history, placing them back in time in a permanent prehistory of the white Western world, and they suggested that the path to the present was paved with subordination and service to what Du Bois called the “white masters of the world.”<sup>53</sup>

The Paris Exposition of 1900, by far the largest international exhibition of its time, drawing some 48 million attendants,<sup>54</sup> greatly expanded the tradition of native village exhibits. The entire area of the Trocadéro gardens was devoted to these colonial displays, and France alone presented over twenty of them.<sup>55</sup> The Dahomeyan village was among the most popular at the exposition, and one writer described

it as follows: “Superb negroes are at work in their cabins, which are covered with thatch. In the midst of them stands the table for the human sacrifices . . . ; the hatchets exhibited on it have sent many unfortunates to the kingdom of shadows.”<sup>56</sup>

The American Negro Exhibit was forced implicitly to negotiate such constructions of “Negro savagery” in the native villages. Many African Americans were highly attuned to and disturbed by the ways in which the sciences of biological racialism and eugenics conflated all peoples of African descent into a racial category or “type,” defined as the essence and emblem of the “primitive” and “savage.” According to eugenicists, African Americans shared a common biological destiny with diverse African peoples, one that would severely impair their ascension in white Western “civilization.” Distressed by the assumptions that linked African Americans to African peoples represented as primitive by the native village, Frederick Douglass proclaimed that the Dahomeyan village at the 1893 Chicago Columbian Exposition



5. Stereograph, Underwood and Underwood. The famous Trocadéro Palace from the end of the Seine Bridge, Paris, 1900. Reproduced from the collections of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.



6. Stereograph, Underwood and Underwood. Natives of Dahomey, Africa—Dahomey Village, Paris, 1900. Reproduced from the collections of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

exhibited “the Negro as a repulsive savage.”<sup>57</sup> Protesting the exclusion of African Americans from official participation in the 1893 world’s fair, Douglass stated that while no African American “gentlemen” served as fair commissioners, “the Dahomeyans were there to exhibit their barbarism and increase American contempt for the Negro intellect.”<sup>58</sup>

While Douglass’s denigration of Dahomeyans is certainly troubling, it also clearly represents a response to racist discourses in the United States. A cartoon from *World’s Fair Puck*, entitled “Darkies’ Day at the Fair,” lampooned the so-called Colored People’s Day, the one concession fair managers made in response to African Americans’ protests concerning their exclusion from the 1893 Columbian Commission. The cartoon depicts a long line of grossly caricatured African and African American men and women—“savages” with spears and “Zip Coons” in ill-fitting suits and top hats—as all essentially the same in a white racist imagination. It jumbles racist stereotypes in much the same way that the biological “type” collapses distinct ethnic groups into one scientific category. In “Darkies’ Day at the Fair,” Africans and African Americans alike, despite extreme distinctions in nation, ethnicity, and culture, all become the same Sambo types—all of them have the huge white lips of American minstrelsy, and all of them are waiting for watermelon. The *Puck* cartoon demonstrates how the scientific “facts” of eugenicists and biological racialists and the racist



7. Cartoon, “Darkies’ Day at the Fair,” *World’s Fair Puck*. Reproduced from the collections of the Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

caricatures of white supremacists mutually reinforced one another in popular responses to the evolutionary “lesson” of the native village.

Against such constructions of “Negro savagery,” the American Negro Exhibit—with its books, patents, sociological studies, and documentary photographs—situated African Americans at the forefront of Western social science and progress. Both in method and content the American Negro Exhibit argued for the superior intellect and strength of character of a people who could make such advances just decades after emancipation, and in the face of segregation and devastating discrimination. In this light, a photograph of Du Bois himself on his visit to the 1900 Paris Exposition proves instructive. In his tails and top hat, Du Bois stands as the man of science and culture, of elite education and superior refinement. He embodies the very position Frederick Douglass was so troubled to see erased and supplanted at the Chicago Columbian Exposition, namely that of the African American gentleman. Indeed, Du Bois is himself on display as a kind of embodied evidence in Paris, as a walking, talking “American Negro Exhibit” of one.<sup>59</sup>

Despite, or paradoxically, because of its narrative of progress and

success, the American Negro Exhibit could be harnessed to arguments critical of U.S. racism and European colonialism or to arguments complacent about such global violence. In fact, Thomas J. Calloway aimed to present a largely accommodationist account of African American progress in the American Negro Exhibit, a narrative reminiscent of that forwarded by Booker T. Washington in his famous “Atlanta Compromise” speech at the 1895 Atlanta Cotton States Exposition.<sup>60</sup> Calloway celebrated Washington as a hero and a race leader, and using Washington’s portrait to frame the American Negro Exhibit literally, he drew on Washington’s political positions to frame the exhibit ideologically.<sup>61</sup> In 1895, Washington had argued that segregation might be tolerated in the short term for economic advances in the long term, and in 1900, Calloway suggested that lynchings, “horrible” as they were, must not be allowed to overshadow the efforts of the United States in educating African Americans.<sup>62</sup> Rather than celebrating African American resistance to overwhelming U.S. racism, Calloway sought to congratulate the United States on a triumph of racist paternalism.

8. W. E. B. Du Bois  
at the 1900 Paris  
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In outlining “three strong reasons for a negro exhibit at the Paris exposition,” Calloway suggests that African Americans need “occasional opportunities to show in a distinctive way the evidences of their progress”—to “prove” their “value to the body politic.” That value, according to Calloway, lies in labor, in producing the raw materials of national wealth. “The average American citizen never stops to consider that practically every cotton fabric he wears is a product of negro labor so far as the raw material is concerned.”<sup>63</sup> Arguing further for the political import of the American Negro Exhibit, Calloway proclaims that the display will answer international critiques of U.S. imperialism: “Much criticism of the United States is indulged in abroad on the ground that this country has assumed to annex new territory largely populated with dark races, when, it is charged, this nation proscribes in every possible way the ten millions of such people in its own borders. This exhibit can show other nations the other side of the story and can furnish evidences of marvelous progress of the colored people as an offset to the charges of proscription.”<sup>64</sup> In Calloway’s vision, the American Negro Exhibit could prove U.S. beneficence, and legitimize U.S. imperialism, by showing how much “better off” men and women of color were under the “civilizing” influence of the United States. If, as Robert Rydell has argued, the United States hoped, with its participation in the 1900 Paris Exposition, “to demonstrate to the world and to Americans back home that the newly reconstructed American nation-state had come of age as an imperial power,”<sup>65</sup> then it also hoped to show the righteousness of that empire, and the American Negro Exhibit could be held up as an example of U.S. “success” in “handling” people of color.<sup>66</sup>

As the native village might be conceived as an emblem of the problem to be solved by the so-called civilizing forces of Europe and the United States, the American Negro Exhibit might be perceived as a solution to that problem. Once again, Calloway argues:

The “Fashoda incident” and the present Boer war are only the outcroppings of a tremendous European invasion of Africa. This “dark continent” is no longer dark, as the most gigantic efforts of capital are being directed toward opening up the continent for the overplus population of Europe. The millions of native Africans in the continent, who must in some way be assimilated into the body politic, will more and more force upon the statesmen of Europe and Africa the

same negro problem which this country has struggled with for three centuries. Whatever faults may be charged to the people of the United States, the people of African descent in this country are civilized, Christianized possessors of vast educational privileges and owners of perhaps a half billion dollars' worth of property. They are engaged in every industry and pursuit common to white Americans, and universally accredited with rapid progress. America can, therefore, furnish Europe with such evidences of the negro's value as a laborer, a producer and a citizen that the statecraft of the old world will be wiser in the shaping of its African policies.<sup>67</sup>

According to Calloway, the American Negro Exhibit might serve as a kind of how-to guide to civilizing and Christianizing "the Negro." By following the American Negro Exhibit's example, Calloway suggests, European colonizers might transform "problems" into valuable laborers and producers.<sup>68</sup>

Du Bois's vision of an educated, elite Talented Tenth, of "co-worker[s] in the kingdom of culture,"<sup>69</sup> is clearly antithetical to Calloway's colonial propaganda, and despite Calloway's intent, his ideological framing of the American Negro Exhibit could not contain all voices and visions of dissent represented in the exhibit. In fact, as Robert Rydell has argued, "Just as the 1895 Atlanta Exposition had propelled Washington to a position of national prominence, so the Paris Exposition bestowed international recognition on Du Bois as an equally authoritative spokesperson for people of African descent."<sup>70</sup> Du Bois's 1900 Georgia Negro studies provide a multivalenced example of his own newly powerful antiracist vision at the turn of the century.

The global racializing of labor that Calloway seemed to support was the problem of the color line that Du Bois first condemned in his Georgia Negro studies for the 1900 Paris Exposition. A result of the African slave trade and of European and North American colonialism and imperialism, the racializing of labor enabled the "doctrine of the Superior Race," a theory of white supremacism that harnessed Western sciences and history to its purposes.<sup>71</sup> According to Du Bois, "the real European imperialism pictured in the Paris Exposition of 1900" (16) was not the image Europe projected, of "Wealth and *Science*" (2; emphasis added) but a vision of "wealth and *power*" (16; emphasis added) in which science was called on to legitimize power, to

“prove the all but universal assumption that the color line had a scientific basis,” and thereby to support racial segregation, discrimination, exploitation, and slavery in biological terms (20).

Against this vision of scientifically legitimized white supremacy, Du Bois wields his own science in the Georgia Negro studies. He denaturalizes the color line, wrenching it from biology and biological explanations, to relocate it back in the terrain of social history, economics, and global politics. The introductory chart that framed Du Bois’s social study of “The Georgia Negro” for visitors at the Paris Exposition of 1900 carried his lasting declaration: “The problem of the twentieth century is the problem of the color-line.”<sup>72</sup> A couple of months later, Du Bois would repeat those words at the first Pan-African Congress in London,<sup>73</sup> and he would later use them to introduce his best-known work, *The Souls of Black Folk* (1903).<sup>74</sup> Du Bois’s social and economic critique of the color line has had tremendous influence on the scholarship of race (and of Du Bois himself) for over a century. And while fundamentally important, the critical emphasis on these particular structural insights has overshadowed Du Bois’s visual conception of the color line. This book’s task is to restore the visual significance of the color line, an understanding of particular consequence now, as scholars work to define an emergent visual culture studies.

As Irit Rogoff and Nicholas Mirzoeff have argued, the study of visual culture is best defined by a common set of questions, rather than a canon of objects or a privileged group of media.<sup>75</sup> Visual culture scholars seek to understand how *viewing* creates *viewers*, how acts of looking are encouraged and circumscribed culturally, and how access to the gaze shapes subjectivity.<sup>76</sup> What I aim to contribute to that conversation, along with bell hooks and others, is an understanding of how race fundamentally informs these visual dynamics.<sup>77</sup> I argue that the questions we ask as visual culture scholars must account for the ways in which race both determines and is determined by acts of looking, and for the ways in which the viewer and those viewed are racially inscribed. In recovering Du Bois’s visual sense of the color line, this book demonstrates both how fundamentally the visual has been racialized, and how race has been envisioned.

*Photography on the Color Line* reads Du Bois’s Georgia Negro photographs against archives that sought to pose African American bodies

and contain African American identities in the service of a racial hierarchy at the turn of the century. Methodologically, then, this book conceives historical context as the contest of cultural meaning produced between and across archives. But archives do not produce meaning solely in dialogue with one another. Archives are created and utilized as evidence to support varied cultural discourses; they emblemize epistemologies. In chapter 1, I aim to tease out such ways of knowing by reading Du Bois's articulation of double consciousness as the "sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others" within an emergent psychological conversation that posed self-recognition as a visual process. "Envisioning Race" examines the visual paradigms that inform Du Bois's understanding of double consciousness, the Veil, and second sight, and suggests that race and visual culture were mutually constitutive in the Jim Crow United States.

In the second chapter, I read Du Bois's Georgia Negro portraits against the scientific archives that constructed a visual racial typology at the turn of the century. I argue that Du Bois replicates scientific methodology in the Georgia Negro albums to undermine the assumptions about race forwarded by biological racialists, especially by eugenicists. Further, Du Bois represents elite class standing and cultural refinement to contest scientific claims about innate "Negro inferiority," thereby evoking class to trump (an essentialized hierarchy of) race. "The Art of Scientific Propaganda" explains how photographs can critically "signify" on specific visual genealogies, undermining the presumed neutrality of visual evidence, and argues that even the most commodified and sentimentalized of photographic forms can be transformed into sites of resistance.

In chapter 3, "'Families of Undoubted Respectability,'" I investigate the ideologically laden nature of this critical strategy, teasing out the limitations of Du Bois's particular resistance to racism. I suggest that Du Bois anchors his antiracist critique in a patriarchal model of an African American elite, envisioning a restrained and disciplined African American manhood in critical contrast to the images of black manhood figured in the discourses enabling lynching at the turn of the century. Here I examine how Du Bois's vision of an elite African American patriarchy depends on controlling, containing, and even condemning the sexuality of African American women. By heralding class to challenge race, Du Bois reinscribes the constraints of a (middle-class) gender hierarchy.

The fourth and final chapter focuses more directly on the racial terror of lynching, returning to the visual nexus of understanding that informs Du Boisian double consciousness, the Veil, and second sight, but this time examining representations of whiteness and the processes of white identification in early twentieth-century lynching photographs. While my initial work with these concepts in chapter 1 is focused through *The Souls of Black Folk*, in chapter 4, I read these ideas through Du Bois's later essay "The Souls of White Folk." In "Spectacles of Whiteness: The Photography of Lynching," I examine the representations of spectators' bodies in lynching photographs, assessing these images as an obscured archive of whiteness.

I conclude with an epilogue that situates the archivist in the archive, exploring how representations of Du Bois himself signified in relation to the emergent imagery of the New Negro that his 1900 Paris Exposition photographs helped to define. Through this analysis, the epilogue reinforces the value of a critically comparative archival methodology, arguing that such work can generate a distinct visual genealogy, and a new cultural vision.

This book, therefore, assesses how Du Bois's Georgia Negro photographs engage and challenge the meaning of the color line. It recuperates Du Bois as a visual theorist of race, demonstrating how he conceived and contested the color line from within the domain of visual culture—in visual terms and through visual media. Deciphering the contestatory meanings of the Georgia Negro photographs, *Photography on the Color Line* also models a way of reading photographic archives that is critically comparative, that examines archives as ideological projects with distinct visual genealogies. In so doing, the book suggests new ways for scholars of visual culture to understand images as directly informed by and participating in vital cultural debates. Finally, the book demonstrates how central race has been to visual cultural production and how visual culture has also fundamentally shaped and informed the meaning of race in the United States.