

FORT WASHINGTON, MARYLAND, CHRISTMAS 2006. I was visiting my Aunt Joanne for the holidays, a ritual pleasure I try to enjoy whenever I travel home to the DC area. For decades since my mother's early death and her own mother's death years later, Joanne has been the glue that connects me to my mother's side of the family; linking and updating me regularly on aunts and uncles, cousins and family friends scattered across the US with news and photos, gossip and history. Her extraordinary channel of communication certainly works both ways, as she quizzes me lovingly and frequently during phone conversations about my research and my travels, and circulates this information widely throughout our family. "Auntie Jo," as we affectionately call her, is the Barnes/Hammond family archivist.

A few months before my visit, we had spoken about the research I had been doing on black European family photographs. She was so fascinated by the idea of these photos that I brought along my laptop to show her some of the images I had been describing. After seeing and talking about them for a while, she said how much they reminded her of similar photographs of our family. Unfamiliar with such photos, I asked which images she was referring to, since the only ones I remembered were the Instamatic snapshots, department-store portraits, and school or wedding photos that recorded the lives of my kin in

Harrisburg, Wichita, Madison, Detroit, and Chicago. Disappearing down a hallway and up the stairs, my aunt announced in a suspiciously understated tone: “Actually, I did find a few interesting ones when I cleared out the house in Harrisburg.”

“So what did you do with them?” I called back to her from where I sat downstairs. As I asked this question, I felt somehow resigned to the fact that the pictures she referred to had most likely gone a well-worn route to the trash can, as my family has a deep loathing of clutter. To my surprise, she called back from an ill-defined location in the maze of her house: “Well, I got rid of a lot of them and was thinking I’d just throw the rest of them out. I don’t think anybody would want them and they take up so much space.” I immediately yelled back, “I’ll take them!” startling myself with the vehemence of my own reply. “But what pictures are you talking about? And where are they?” I shouted again. I had barely gotten the words out of my mouth when my aunt suddenly reappeared, dragging a large, black garbage bag full of photos. Emptying its contents onto a bed, I soon discovered that the “few interesting photos” she had found were a stunning collection of twenty to thirty images that included turn-of-the-century tintypes, sepia-toned studio portraits from the 1920s, and a range of snapshots taken in the thirties, forties, and fifties.

Sorting through these beautiful, fragile objects with astonishment and wonder while at the same time hiding my distress that they had been residing in a garbage bag for an unspecified period of time, I quizzed my aunt about the scenes pictured in them. Most were photographs of my grandparents and of her and her siblings, but she could only identify a few of the places and other people featured in them. Hours later, after I had begged her not to discard a single image without first phoning me and then promising to return the next day with my scanner, she looked at me poignantly, and in a voice tinged with appreciation and slight disbelief responded, “You know, I never thought you’d be interested in these. Because, well, what can you do with pictures like these? I mean, why would anybody be interested in somebody’s old family photos?”

Since that conversation, I have had numerous enlightening and enriching talks with my aunt about photography. She shared with me her insights into the photos of our family, and I shared with her some of the challenges I have encountered in my work on the early photography of black families in





Germany and in the United Kingdom. Our conversations helped me understand how photographs reflect shared cultural practices in different black communities and how photography offers individuals in those communities a medium through which to create a vision of themselves that does not always square with how they are popularly perceived or with what we associate with those contexts in the present. Time and again, our conversations returned to the same point: that images matter to black folks.

As numerous scholars of visual culture have shown, photography plays a critical role in articulating black people's complex relationship to cultural identity and national belonging. Photography captures a given moment in the life of an individual, while at the same time offering a means of creating an image of our lives and selves as we would like to be seen. The photographic image has played a dual role in rendering the history of African diasporic communities, because of its ability to document and simultaneously pathologize the history, culture, and struggles of these communities. Photography also provides a means of challenging negative stereotypes and assumptions about black people in ways that create a counterimage of who they are, as well as who they might be or become. Indeed, it is the equally powerful positive and negative impact of photography that has made it such an important vehicle of social and cultural formation.

This book tries to understand the complex relationship between how black people image and how they imagine themselves. It asks when and how an image of a black European emerges as *part of*, rather than as deviant or distinct from, her or his national cultures. I argue that we find the visual emergence of such black European subjects in the frames of what are seemingly the most mundane examples of historical photography: family photos. Engaging the photograph as a dynamic and contested site of black cultural formation, the chapters that follow explore how two black European communities used photography to create modes of identification and community in the first half of the twentieth century. Here the comments of my aunt resonate with added effect. The directness and simplicity of the question she posed on that wintry afternoon visit served as an important point of departure, as one of those deceptively uncomplicated queries I believe scholars should take seriously in our analyses. I therefore begin my own inquiry into photography and the African diaspora in Europe by reflecting on a similarly basic question: Why use photography, and family photography in particular, to understand the history of a community?

The simple answer is that photographs are valuable historical sources that document the past. Photographs *record* history. They constitute crucial forms of historical documentation of the events, individuals, and contexts captured in the photographic image. Yet they provide historians not so much with unmediated sources of historical evidence but instead what Peter Burke has called historical “traces” that bear witness to things not put into words.¹ But while photographs are undoubtedly an invaluable historical resource, there is also something more to them—nuances and complexities that scholars of visual culture have long sought to theorize and account for as a significant part of a photographic image’s social, cultural, and historical salience.

The feminist theorist and historian of photography Laura Wexler has written that what we learn of the past by looking at photographic documents is not “the way things were.”² What they show us of the past is instead “*a record of choices*,”³ for, as she maintains, “it is only through understanding the choices that have been made between alternatives—learning what won out and what was lost, how it happened and at what cost—that the meaning of the past can appear.”⁴ Extending Wexler’s point, I argue that it is important to read photographs not only as records of choices but also as records of *intentions*. The question of why a photograph was made involves understanding the social, cultural, and historical relationships figured in the image, as well as a larger set of relationships outside and beyond the frame—relationships we might think of as the *social life of the photo*. The social life of the photo includes the intentions of both sitters and photographers as reflected in their decisions to take particular kinds of pictures. It also involves reflecting historically on what those images say about who these individuals aspired to be; how they wanted to be seen; what they sought to represent and articulate through them; and what they attempted or intended to project and portray.

Linking Wexler’s argument to the probing question put to me by my aunt, how should we interpret what one might call “less eventful” photographs, specifically, family and domestic photos that do not depict a particular event, significant or recognizable figures, or even noteworthy or highly identifiable sites or contexts? How should we read the histories recorded in such images and imaging practices? What kind of historical knowledge might they provide? While it is certainly both valuable and necessary to use photographs as visual documentation of historical facts, events, individual biographies or contexts, I would like to pose another question that shifts our focus slightly,

yet with particularly revealing implications. What if we were to silence historical biography temporarily? What if we took the unusual step of backgrounding the facts of biography, not as a way of ignoring or disregarding this information, but as a way of gaining greater access to the historical insights such images might offer? Put another way, rather than using photographs as documents or evidence of the past in the sense of an illustration, confirmation, or supplement to historical facts or information we already know, what if we thought of the image instead as itself *an enactment* of that past? What I am suggesting is that we engage these images as sites of *articulation* and *aspiration*; as personal and social statements that express how ordinary individuals envisioned their sense of self, their subjectivity, and their social status; and as objects that capture and preserve those articulations in the present as well as for the future.

Following Wexler, such an approach understands photographs as recording a series of choices that construct complex accounts of the social relations they depict. As John Berger has written, “Photographs bear witness to a human choice being exercised in a given situation. . . . [It] is already a message about the event it records. . . . At its simplest, the message, decoded, means: *I have decided that seeing this is worth recording.*”⁵ The choice Berger describes is a decision to render a particular event, person, object, or moment significant, remarkable, or representative; to designate it as meaningful, enjoyable, or reflective of some part of a life known to its subjects. Yet understanding these relations as historical formations requires us to read them not only through the lens of biography and the facts of “what we know.” It necessarily forces us to examine both exactly what we believe we see in the photograph and the frameworks through which those depictions become meaningful social representations. Put another way, such an approach asks us to consider what kind of histories we can write *through* images when we make the photograph the center of, rather than an illustration or documentary supplement to, historical writing.

Although we have comparatively little information about many of the photos on which this book focuses, such images nevertheless offer important historical insights when read as found objects and revealing examples of *vernacular photography*. Frequently anonymous and not made as art, vernacular photography is defined as a genre of everyday image-making most often created by amateur photographers and intended as documents of personal his-

tory. Vernacular photography comprises family and professional studio portraits as well as casually made snapshots.⁶ As the curator and art historian Brian Wallis explains, “These are banal photographs, often recorded by the most ordinary photographers, small-town studio operators, professional photographers on assignment, dads with cameras in the backyard. One hallmark of these vernacular photographs is that they belie no apparent aesthetic ambition other than to record what passes in front of their camera with reasonable fidelity.”⁷

Emphasizing the critical role vernacular image-making has played in the African American community as a medium through which to construct a positive counterimage of the black subject, Wallis argues that “by taking these pictures as found . . . rather than as individual images, it is possible to reconstitute the sorts of narratives and protocols for viewing that originally structured the circulation of such photographs.” He thus urges scholars of black culture to consider vernacular photography “a politicized element of everyday life” that helps us understand “the role of artifactual objects—such as photographs—in any individual’s contested daily social, political and personal interactions.”⁸

The work of scholars and curators like Wallis and the renowned photographer and archivist Deborah Willis, who have brought exceptional collections of vernacular photographs of African American communities to the attention of wider audiences, demonstrates the undeniable importance of such images for understanding the history of blacks in the United States. But what of Europe’s black populations? Can a similar argument be made with respect to the vernacular image-making practices of blacks in Europe? Can we see in them a parallel function and historical significance, and if so, what constitutes the specificity of their social and cultural import as artifacts of black cultural formation in the European context?

The chapters that follow explore these questions by engaging early twentieth-century photography of black European families as vernacular cultural artifacts and as particular kinds of historical articulations. I read them as objects that *place* people both historically and socially, through the ways they articulate a profound aspiration to forms of national and cultural belonging, inclusion, and social status. These photos document such articulations not only through the factual evidence they record, but, more provocatively, through the ways they *stage* intentions, aspirations, and performances of black

European subjects in formation, and capture important moments of enunciation. But let us be clear—these are not moments of pronouncement; indeed, quite the contrary. Their moments of enunciation come in far less strident tones and forms, through visual compositions that juxtapose lightheartedness and formality, jocular and respectability, work and leisure, celebration and commemoration—each set in the context of family and friends, work and play, home and hearth. They are moments that often seem so self-evident that we frequently take them for granted. Yet as I will contend, it is this self-evidence that makes them register so profoundly as particularly compelling enunciations of self and community, (af)filiation and improvisation.

What choices can we read in domestic images and family photographs? What choices make them make sense as depictions of what we might call black German, black British, or black European life? Put another way, how do such images *register*? Given their context, the home and everyday life, their primary register is clearly that of family. But this register is not merely descriptive, for such photographs do not record simple relations of kinship or genealogy. We must ask what kinds of historical information they offer us, but perhaps more important, we must ask more specifically *from where in the image does it emanate?*

DURHAM, NORTH CAROLINA, FALL 2003. For almost every year of my life, the last two weeks of October were a vexed time for me. These were the two weeks a year I spent obsessing about a birthday gift for my father. But this year was different. I had managed to come up with the perfect idea for a present, and not only had I managed to do it weeks in advance, I had even found it within the four walls of my own home. After years of the glorified itinerancy that constitutes the life of an academic, I had finally begun unpacking a decade's worth of stuff I had been schlepping around or storing in various places since graduate school. In that unpacking, I had come up on a bag of 8mm and Super 8 films of my childhood. The bag was a jumble of little boxes—tattered yellow cartons with a big red stripe that proudly announced them as “Kodachrome.”

Looking at those worn but still perky little boxes provoked a series of intense and quite sensory memories. For one thing, the fake (i.e., vinyl) carpet-bag that held them smelled exactly like my grandmother's house. That bag

and that smell immediately transported me back to 1112 North Fourteenth Street, to Nana and Poppop’s three-story row house just off Herr Street in Harrisburg, Pennsylvania—every immaculate detail of which I remember to this day. Several of the yellow film cartons were unmarked, but most were labeled in eerily familiar, handwritten scribble—script I recognized as my mother’s and my grandmother’s, two enormous maternal presences in my childhood who had passed out of my life several decades earlier. My idea had been to transfer these fragile, languishing images of my family from rapidly deteriorating film to video and to present this small family archive to my dad on his birthday. My sister was completely in favor of the idea. Like me, she, too, was relieved that I had come up with an early gift idea for “the man who has everything,” as we fondly referred to him. And as my dad will eagerly attest, the gift proved a big hit.

In fact, his response overwhelmed us. He smiled. He chuckled. He looked back and forth from the TV to me, back to the TV, then to my sister, and back again to the TV. He pelleted us with questions: “Where did you get this?”; “How did you do this?” Finally he exhaled with pride and satisfaction: “This is the best gift ever!” And with that, the whole process began all over again. Captivated by and completely swept up in these images and the vivid memories they evoked, at one point he actually leapt from his seat and went straight up to the TV. Pointing with animated gestures at and around the screen, the images seemed almost to compel him to narrate what was happening: who was here, who was there, who was filming, and what was going on (and indeed going wrong) both inside and outside the frame. These images *moved* my father literally as well as figuratively, for believe me, my dad is not what one would call an animated kind of a guy.

But there is a backstory to this innocent and well-received gift. For the scrupulous daughters that my sister and I are, we decided to screen the finished video a few days before presenting it to my dad. Sitting there in her living room, watching ourselves as infants crawling across the screen of her TV, our initial responses were the delighted coos and giggles one would expect from any audience witnessing the first birthdays and initial steps of infants and toddlers. Very quickly, however, our giggles began to fade and a curious silence enveloped us. I say “curious” because when my sister and I are together, we can rarely manage to actually be quiet, let alone achieve the supreme sonic

suppression known as silence. I cannot speak for my sister, but for me, barely ten minutes into what was a half-hour video, that silence somehow became too much, and I suddenly heard myself saying sheepishly, “I don’t think I can watch this right now.” To my surprise, my sister replied, “Me either. Let’s wait to watch it with Daddy.” I was saved. Or maybe not . . .

As an academic, a historian, and a theorist, I am unfortunately nearly incapable of letting moments such as these go unreflected, and even less likely to let them go uncommented. Probed and prodded by two friends to whom I recounted this experience, I realized that what was so unsettling to me about the film was its *movement*. In fact, I would actually describe it as its *rhythm*. My mother died when I was eleven years old, and although I have countless photographs of her and she remains a lively presence in the stories and memories of my family and her friends, it had been more than three decades since I had seen the figure that constituted my mother actually *move*. Indeed, the rhythms of these images physically moved my dad from the couch all the way over to the TV screen.

Unlike the photos of her I had scrutinized for years, those films animated my mother. They set her in motion by giving her affect, intensity, *charm*. My mom practically sizzled with personality in those films. She looked fun and interesting. She looked poised and elegant. She looked like a black Mary Tyler Moore, back in the days when she was Dick Van Dyke’s devoted yet fabulous and sexy wife on Bonny Meadow Lane in New Rochelle, New York.

But they also put her in motion in that choppy rhythmic way that 8mm films do everyone in them. They syncopate people by way of the bumpy, shifty cadence they produce mechanically through the motion of multiple still frames moving in sequence as film across the backlighting of a projector—a sound I can hear as I write and describe it in these pages. The rhythmic syncopation of this projector effect blended with the affective rhythms of my mother in





her party dress, entertaining guests, and flirting with the camera, making my mother seem playful, festive, and, well, just incredibly cool! And it was precisely this—the fact that the woman in this video seemed *so incredibly cool*—that haunted and unsettled me. That woman was the mom I had always dreamed of having. She was the mom I always wanted (and wanted to be) as an adult, and she was the mom I had actually had, but never really known. She was the mom I had once had, but could no longer remember.

My mother's animated image returned me to some of the rhythms I could not see as a child in her presence and had lost sight of in her absence as an adult. That return led me to try to connect the rhythms of the moving image to those of the still photograph, and in the process, it led me to a deeper engagement with the affects of domestic photography and of family photos in particular. Affect is clearly not confined to the moving image—the rhythms and affects I experienced in watching the home movie of my mother are equally present in the still image. To pose the question again, how do such images *register*? To ask how these photos register is to attempt to catalogue both a sensibility and a range of sensory affects they display and evoke in others. Family and the forms of filiation and affiliation, linkage and belonging that family evokes constitute a crucial sensibility that registers in these images at multiple sensory and affective levels. It is a sensibility that begins with vision and sight, with *what we see*, but it certainly does not end there.

Frames of Reference: Photographic Senses and Sensibilities

Three conceptual frames structure my examination of the senses and sensibilities of vernacular image-making as a critical cultural practice for African diasporic communities in Europe: family and (af)filiation, seriality and circulation, and sensate photographic registers. The first of these, *family and the (af)filiative connections* established through photography, is the central analytic lens I use to think through the two archives of images at the center of my



analysis. These archives represent the two primary photographic genres that constitute family photography: snapshot and portrait photography. The first set of images comprises snapshot photographs of four black German families taken between the turn of the century and 1945. The second is a collection of studio portraits of African Caribbean migrants to postwar Britain taken between 1948 and 1960. Together, these images present photographic accounts of two black European communities rarely seen in relation to one another—communities with very different diasporic, national, and colonial histories—at key moments in their formation. Here again, the question that orients my analysis is: how do black families and communities in diaspora use family photography to carve out a place for themselves in the European contexts they come to call home? What do these images tell us about the processes of self, community, and homemaking in which they were engaged, and how do they use photography to communicate this?

The answer to these questions lies in the second conceptual frame of the book: the *vernacular seriality and circulation* of the images. The photographs examined here are images that conform to familiar and, in some cases, quite rigid formats—formats that repeat the conventions of their respective genres through the use of recognizable visual compositions. As I will argue, it is the familiarity and serial reproduction of these compositions and conventions that, in large part, make them register so widely and evocatively. These are images whose most striking feature is that they are *not* singular or exceptional; rather, it is in the sheer ordinariness and prevalence of these images and practices in multiple cultural contexts that their import can be found. Indeed, the ordinariness and widespread circulation of such images as expressive forms of vernacular culture demonstrates the enormous cultural work they perform in creating a sense of self, community, and belonging for their subjects.

My approach to these images focuses on precisely this enunciative dimension of black vernacular photography. In other words, my interest is in what the practice of making images did for black sitters as individuals and in communities, and in what it allowed them to do and say about themselves. What did a specific photographic genre or practice allow them to do through the image of themselves it created? Rather than taking these photos at face value as the evidence of history, I emphasize the historical value of vernacular photographs by taking up the fundamental question of how particular photos *become* the evidence of history. Such a question recenters what I think of as the

sticky residue of memory and history that makes us cling to certain photographs and that *affectively* affixes them to us and to our memories.

In a frequently cited passage from his translator's introduction to Gilles Deleuze's and Félix Guattari's *A Thousand Plateaus*, Brian Massumi defines affect as follows: "Affect/affection. Neither word denotes a personal feeling (*sentiment* in Deleuze and Guattari). *L'Affect* (Spinoza's *affectus*) is an ability to affect and be affected. It is a prepersonal intensity corresponding to the passage from one experiential state to another and implying an augmentation or diminution in that body's capacity to act. *L'Affection* (Spinoza's *affectio*) is each such state considered as an encounter between the affected body and the second, affecting body (with the body taken in its broadest possible sense to include 'mental' or ideal bodies)."⁹ In Massumi's definition, affect is, on the one hand, not a feeling, as feelings are personal and biographical. Emotions, on the other hand, are social. In contrast, affect is "prepersonal." Carefully parsing affect from its conflation with these two related terms—terms often used interchangeably with affect—Eric Shouse extends Massumi's definition by further delineating affect, emotion, and feeling. Summarizing the work of prominent theorists of affect including Sylvan Tompkins, Eve Sedgwick, Virginia Demos, Teresa Brennan, Massumi, and others, Shouse explains that a feeling is "a *sensation* that has been checked against previous experiences and labeled. It is biographical because every person has a distinct set of previous sensations."¹⁰ Shouse defines emotion as the "*projection/display of a feeling*." Affect is, by comparison, more abstract. It is a "*non-conscious experience of intensity*; it is a moment of unformed and unstructured potential."¹¹ Citing Massumi's extended discussion of the term in *Parables for the Virtual*, Shouse similarly maintains that "affect cannot be fully realized in language, and [*sic*] because affect is always prior to and/or outside of consciousness. Affect is the body's way of preparing itself for action in a given circumstance by adding a quantitative dimension of intensity to the quality of an experience."¹² Linking Massumi to Tompkins's contention that affects remain nonconscious and unformed and are "aroused easily by factors over which the individual has little control,"¹³ Shouse continues: "For the infant affect is emotion, for the adult *affect is what makes feelings feel*. It is what determines the intensity (quantity) of a feeling (quality), as well as the background intensity of our everyday lives (the half-sensed, ongoing hum of quantity/quality that we experience when we are not really attuned to any experience at all)."¹⁴

While affect is characterized here as prepersonal or nonconscious, contact with certain objects and media also necessarily produces affective responses. As Shouse points out, “Given the ubiquity of affect, it is important to take note that the power of many forms of media lies not so much in their ideological effects, but in their ability to create affective resonances independent of content or meaning.”¹⁵ Photographs are one such medium—a medium that produces affective resonances and attachments in ways we cannot necessarily explain and that are often detached from personal or biographical investments. Family photos in particular are affect-laden objects that incite individuals to emotional responses and modes of intensive engagement. Photographs “move us.” They move us to affect and to be affected; they move us by shifting us from one intense experiential state to another. They can arrest us in ways that diminish our capacity to respond, and they provoke us in ways that augment our capacity to engage. They are objects that engender experiences of intensity that we can often only identify, locate, excavate, and order after the fact. If affect is “what makes feelings feel,” then photographs are objects that catalyze affect and make affect register.

It was the abiding affective resonances and attachments expressed through these highly recognizable forms of photographic self-presentation that led these individuals to make certain kinds of images, and the reason photographs were viewed as an available and efficacious medium for self-creation and articulation. While *affect* is a somewhat slippery term that has come to have great critical purchase in contemporary academic discourse, in this text, I take what might be considered a relatively simple approach to engaging affect, using this term to attend to how certain photographs move people, and why they catalyze forms of emotion, sentiment, meaning, and value as objects of feeling and relation, desire and aspiration. I also use *affect* to describe the excess of what registers in and through photographs beyond the visual, for the formal patterns and attributes these images and their sitter-subjects sought to reproduce resonated at multiple levels in these photographs, and it was for this reason that they were deployed by different constituencies to elicit particular responses and connections. Unpacking what motivated a community’s attachment to the serial reproduction of certain kinds of images and specific image-making practices, and explaining how they functioned at particular historical moments, gives us a different appreciation of the reappearance of familiar or

similar (albeit never exact) reproductions of the same types of images over time.

When we think about the seriality of these photographs as not simply a hollow replication of a particular photographic genre but instead as having affective and enunciative functions, we begin to understand these images as part of more complex processes of cultural articulation, improvisation, and reiteration. Far from constituting a replication, they are repetitions with a difference—a difference inflected and infused with racialized, gendered, class-specific, and diasporic meanings. They in turn give us a clearer sense of how and why certain photographs register at multiple levels, as well as of what those registers tell us about the cultural work of vernacular photography for diasporic communities.

The photographs in question are images that have circulated privately and publicly; they are images that traveled within families across different generations and, in some cases, even across oceans and continents. They are photographs made for particular and often sentimental reasons, yet they were images that also served to express the aspirations of their sitters to be or become particular kinds of subjects. Regardless of whether these individuals accomplished the modes of belonging or inclusion they aimed to create; regardless of whether those who viewed or received them invested these images with the meanings their sitters had intended; and regardless of whether these images succeeded in presenting their subjects' aspirations or intentions with greater or lesser accuracy—the photographs nevertheless represent expressive cultural texts that are of abiding historical significance for the insights they offer into the process of diasporic cultural formation. For while all family photographs stage such aspirations, these images of black communities in diaspora visualize creative forms of family and relation produced over and against the disparate geographies and temporalities that constitute diasporic migration, settlement, and dwelling.

Taking inspiration from Stuart Hall's conception of identity as fundamentally "a matter of 'becoming' as well as 'being,'" the forms of self-presentation displayed in and through the images and image-making practices elaborate photography's role in the production of what I shall call "*subjects in becoming*."¹⁶ These images enunciate forms of identification and subjectivity that perhaps, at the time, had yet to be articulated. The gestures and enunciations expressed

through these photos provided a foundation for the later emergence of the subjects we now recognize as black Britons and black Germans. These black European identities were by no means contemporary phenomena—they are profoundly historical, in ways that I contend emerged visually through the lens of family photographic practices.

Explicating the affective and enunciative functions of these images provides the underlying rationale for the third analytic frame of the book: an emphasis on the multiple *sensate photographic registers* that render these images meaningful and expressive cultural objects. As I have indicated, these photographs are not restricted to the sensory realm of the visual. They also register at other sensory levels that reveal our attachments to family photographs. While the affective force and cultural import of such images clearly manifests visually through the familial frames of reference they display, it also registers beyond them—in excess of the visual and, indeed, beyond what we see. Thus, starting from the visual, my readings explore how these images register at two additional sensory levels: the *haptic* (touch) and the *sonic* (sound).

Attending to the multiple registers of the image brings the visual together with the other sensory modalities through which we apprehend and respond to photographs. The majority of these images are portraits, but many are snapshots taken outside the commodified, professional realm of photographic studios. They were taken and circulated by the amateur photographers who shot them—the friends and family members of the subjects featured within their frames. Yet they were taken not only to be seen but also *to be held*. Thus while their primary sensory register is undoubtedly visual, they also have a *haptic* dimension, for they are tactile objects meant to be grasped, held, displayed, and circulated among loved ones.

Like most snapshots, they were made to capture memorable moments, primarily happy occasions and moments of celebration. Yet they were also intended to have a physical and material life; these images were meant to be kept, but also to move, to circulate spatially and temporally, traveling between people and forward in time, and taking on a life well beyond those who made and posed in them. The photo album—a haptic object par excellence—constituted a primary vehicle for such movement, as the site of the handoff and transfer between people, places, and times. Some of these images were contained in elaborately inscribed scrapbooks that I encountered belatedly in my research, often in various states of disassemblage. Yet it was a dis-

assembly motivated by the same haptic desire that forged them—the often well-intentioned scavenging of friends and family who sought to retain or redistribute individual photographic traces of now deceased loved ones as yet another iteration of these images’ lives and circulations.

Part 1 of the book uses the haptic as a tactile and affective register through which to explore the meaning of family snapshots of black Germans as cherished objects meant to be touched, held, exchanged, and displayed. The haptic highlights the vernacular circulation of family photography more generally and serves as a direct link to a third sensory level through which these images register: the sonic. Part 2 uses one particular sonic structuring, music and musical composition, to analyze the improvisational forms of self-fashioning and articulation expressed in studio portraits of postwar African Caribbean migrants to the United Kingdom.

Music provides a generative analytic lens for reading the dynamics of studio photography as the dominant form of vernacular image-making adopted by this generation of West Indian migrants. As static as such images may appear, they in fact have deeper rhythmic and harmonic qualities animating them as forms of representational practice that play an important role in the cultural politics of diasporic memory, history, and cultural formation. Focusing on an archive of photographs of the Caribbean community in Birmingham, England, and on the genre of studio portraiture in particular, this section brings together the sonic, the visual, and the haptic to offer an alternate model for understanding the processes of gendered and racial formation these images instantiate and display.

With respect to each of the three conceptual frames, and most prominently with respect to my exploration of the sensory registers of the photograph, my aim is to access aspects of these images that might otherwise go unnoticed if we engaged them only on the basis of what seems most apparent about them as photographs we seem almost to know by heart. Indeed, my goal in the pages that follow is to intentionally (if temporarily) bracket the documentary elements of “what we know” to more fully appreciate the intentions and experiences of these photographs and the cultural and historical work they sought to accomplish.

Finally, some brief remarks on the structure of the book. As in this introduction, a series of stories frame and introduce each of the remaining sections of the book. Written in shifting authorial voices that highlight my own posi-

tionality in relation to the images, each chapter is conceived as a kind of archive story—stories detailing how I came to find the particular sets of photographs I analyze; stories of my first encounters with these images and others that influenced or affected me; and stories of my related encounters with my own family and our photographs. These encounters shaped my responses to and reflections on the photography of black and biracial families in Europe in ways that I find important to make legible in my analysis of them. I cite them here as a necessary additional frame of reference—at times as part of particular chapters, at times as interstitial reflections on the unanswered and perhaps unanswerable questions these images raise. Each interaction constitutes a moment of *archival encounter* that produced points of critical reflection, insight, and interrogation. I foreground them here in an attempt to keep in play the tensions, points of contact, overlap, and convergence among the multiple temporalities always present in the photographic image.

Seeing a photograph is always an encounter with the present, the past, and the future, especially with regard to historical photography. I encountered these respective archives of images at particular historical moments, in the context of particular institutional or private settings that located me as an African American scholar in specific ways in relation to these communities and to the different places that serve as official and informal repositories for their visual histories. To preserve the dynamics of the archive as an encounter I attempt to make visible some the relational tensions and investments that characterize the African diaspora, and the similarly complex semiotic workings of the image that persistently resurface in our attempts to understand the historical and affective salience of photos as critical sites of cultural production. It is my aspiration to render the affective, sensory, and archival dynamics of these images in ways that enliven their complexities and their relevance and that demonstrate both why they matter and what the matter of the image might tell us about photographs, families, and the relations we think of as the African diaspora.