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“Looking at One’s Self Through the Eyes of Others”: W. E. B. Du Bois’s Photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition

In The Souls of Black Folk, W. E. B. Du Bois describes “double-consciousness” as the “sense of always looking at one’s self through the eyes of others” (8), and thereby situates a visual model of subjectivity at the center of what he calls “the strange meaning of being black” in the United States at the turn of the century (3). For Du Bois, the African American subject position is a psychological space mediated by a “white supremacist gaze” (hooks, “Glory” 50), and therefore divided by contending images of blackness—those images produced by a racist white American culture, and those images maintained by African American individuals, within African American communities. It is the negotiation of these violently disparate images of blackness that produces the “twoness” of Du Bois’s double-consciousness, the psychological burden of attempting to propitiate “two souls, two thoughts, two unreconciled strivings; two warring ideals” (Souls 8-9).

Recognizing the visual paradigms that inform Du Bois’s conception of double-consciousness can help us to understand a remarkable collection of photographs Du Bois assembled for the “American Negro” exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1900. These largely unknown images appear at first enigmatic, but when read against the turn-of-the-century “race” archives they originally engaged, we can see how the photographs emblematize the complicated visual dynamics of double-consciousness. I argue that Du Bois’s “American Negro” photographs disrupt the images of African Americans produced “through the eyes of others” by simultaneously reproducing and supplanting these images with a different vision of the “American Negro.” Specifically, I argue that Du Bois’s photographs challenge the discourses and images that produced an imagined “negro criminality” and propelled the crime of lynching in turn-of-the-century U.S. culture. With this analysis I aim ultimately not only to restore a key text to antiracist visual archives, but also to underscore the importance of W. E. B. Du Bois as a visual theorist of “race.”

Du Bois’s “American Negro” photographs include 363 images of African Americans made by unidentified photographers. Du Bois organized the photographs into four volumes, and presented them in three separate albums, entitled Types of American Negroes, Georgia, U.S.A. (Volumes I-III) and Negro Life in Georgia, U.S.A. (Volume I). The albums comprised one of three displays Du Bois supervised for the American Negro exhibit, including a series of charts and graphs documenting the social and economic progress of African Americans since the Civil War, and a three-volume set containing the complete legal history of African Americans in Georgia. These displays joined other

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Fig. 1. From Du Bois, Types of American Negroes, Georgia, U.S.A. (1900). Reproduced from the Daniel Murray Collection, Library of Congress.

exhibits celebrating work in African American education and African American literary production, which together were organized under the direction of Thomas J. Calloway for the Exposition (Du Bois, “Paris”). The American Negro exhibit was housed in the Palace of Social Economy, and it won a 1900 Paris Exposition grand prize.4

The photograph albums that Du Bois assembled for the American Negro exhibit contain a variety of images, but by far the most numerous and notable are the hundreds of paired portraits that almost entirely fill volumes one and two of the albums. In examining these portraits, I would like to suggest that Du Bois was not simply offering images of African Americans up for perusal, but was critically engaging viewers in the visual and psychological dynamics of “race” at the turn of the century. That very year Du Bois would declare, “The problem of the Twentieth Century is the problem of the color-line,”5 and with his “American Negro” photographs for the 1900 Paris Exposition, Du Bois asked viewers to consider their places in relation to that color line.

Du Bois’s “American Negro” portraits are disturbing, even shocking, in the way they mirror turn-of-the-century criminal mugshots. Indeed, the images appear uncannily doubled, connecting both middle-class portraits and criminal mugshots simultaneously. Drawing upon Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s theory of Signifyin(g) in order to tease out the doubled signifying registers the photographs evoke, I would like to suggest that, by replicating the formal characteristics of both the middle-class portrait and the criminal mugshot, Du Bois’s “American Negro” photographs subvert the visual registers and cultural discourses that consolidated white middle-class privilege in opposition to an imagined “neger criminality” at the turn of the century. Interrogating both middle-class identity and whiteness, Du Bois’s images signify across the multivalent boundaries that divide the “normal” from the “deviant,” challenging not only the images of African Americans produced “through the eyes of others” but also the discursive binaries of privilege that maintain those images. Through a process of visual doubling, Du Bois’s “American Negro” portraits engender a disruptive critical commentary that troubles the visual and discursive foundations of white middle-class dominance by destabilizing their oppositional paradigms.

**Repetition with a Difference**

In an essay entitled “In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life,” bell hooks states: “The camera was the central instrument by which blacks could disprove representations of us created by white folks” (48). It is in this resis-
tant spirit that I think one should read the photographs Du Bois collected for display at the Paris Exposition of 1900. The portraits Du Bois arranged in *Types of American Negroes, Georgia, U.S.A.* work against dominant, white-supremacist images of African Americans perpetuated both discursively and in visual media at the turn of the century. Certainly the photographs differ dramatically from the racist caricatures of Sambo, Zip Coon, and Jim Crow, stereotypes that fueled white fantasies of natural racial superiority. As Du Bois himself said of the Paris Exposition photographs, they "hardly square with conventional American ideas" ("Paris" 577). More importantly, however, I would like to suggest that the photographs problematize the images of "negro criminality" that worked to consolidate a vision of white middle-class privilege at the turn of the century.

Du Bois was well aware that challenging the discourses and images of "negro criminality" was a particularly important political necessity for African Americans. Increasingly over the course of the late nineteenth century, white Americans evoked the imagined "new negro crime" of raping white women in order to legitimize violence upon African American bodies⁶; white lynching mobs called forth an image of the black male rapist in order to justify the torture and mutilation of black men. As Ida B. Wells observed in the 1890s, lynching ultimately served as a form of economic terrorism, as a racialized class warfare translated into the terms of sexual purity and transgression.⁷ Many white supremacists argued that African American criminal behavior had increased dramatically during the postbellum era, and suggested that newly emancipated blacks were reverting to their "natural" state of inferiority without the guidance of their former masters. One writer for *Harper's Weekly* contended that "such outrages are sporadic indications of a lapse of the Southern negro into a state of barbarism or savagery, in which the gratification of the brutish instincts is no longer subjected to the restraints of civilization" ("Negro Problem" 1050). A Harper's correspondent concurred: "In slavery negroes learned how to obey, and obedience means self-control." Lamenting the demise of "discipline" under slavery, the same writer proposed that "a substitute must be found" to ensure the "mental and moral discipline" of the African American (Winton 1414). In this way, some white Americans utilized discourses of "negro criminality" to demonstrate the imagined inherent inferiority of African Americans, and to justify increasing social surveillance, segregation, and violence.

Du Bois explicitly challenged dominant and extreme white perceptions of "negro criminality," particularly the tenets that "the negro element is the most criminal in our population" and that "the negro is much more criminal as a free man than he was as a slave"
In his edited volume *Notes on Negro Crime, Particularly in Georgia* (1904), Du Bois argues that slavery was not a check on inherent criminal tendencies but, instead, an institution that encouraged criminal behavior. In discussing the “faults of negroes” in the “causes of negro crime,” such as “loose ideas of property” and “sexual looseness” (55-56), Du Bois quotes Sidney Olivier, who states: ‘All these faults are real and important causes of Negro crime. They are not racial traits but due to perfectly evident historic causes: slavery could not survive as an institution and teach thrift; and its great evil in the United States was its low sexual morals; emancipation meant for the Negroes poverty and a great stress of life due to sudden change. These and other considerations explain Negro crime’” (56). In delineating the “faults of the whites” in producing “negro criminality,” Du Bois notes “a double standard of justice in the courts,” “enforcing a caste system in such a way as to humiliate Negroes and kill their self-respect,” and foster “peonage and debt-slavery” (56-57). *Notes on Negro Crime, Particularly in Georgia,* demonstrates how discourses of innate “negro criminality” directed public attention away from the material circumstances of extreme poverty and racism under which many “free” African Americans struggled to survive by sharecropping in the post-Reconstruction South.

Ultimately Du Bois, like Ida B. Wells, knew that many whites viewed African American economic success as a threat to white cultural dominance, as a privilege “stolen” from white possessors. Indeed, many whites linked an imagined “negro criminality” to “talk of social equality.” Du Bois examines this position in *The Souls of Black Folk* in a chapter entitled “Of the Coming of John.” What follows is Du Bois’s fictional depiction of an encounter between a white judge and an educated black teacher in the postbellum South. The passage is important because it demonstrates Du Bois’s understanding of how white anxiety over social and economic equality with African Americans was so very often intimately intertwined with white violence upon the black body in turn-of-the-century American culture. In “Of the Coming of John,” Du Bois’s white judge proclaims:

> “Now I like the colored people, and sympathize with all their reasonable aspirations; but you and I both know, John, that in this country the Negromust remain subordinate, and can never expect to be the equal of white men. In their place, your people can be honest and respectful; and God knows, I’ll do what I can to help them. But when they want to reverse nature, and rule white men, and marry white women, and sit in my parlor, then, by God! we’ll hold them under if we have to Lynch every Nigger in the land.”

The immediacy with which Du Bois’s white judge moves from an imagined social equality in the parlor to the desire to Lynch is both terrifying and telling. In Du Bois’s depiction, the middle-class African American man is, in and of himself, a source of white rage. Further, Du Bois’s story marks the dependence of white conceptions of African American “honesty” on a system of racial subordination. In Du Bois’s rendition of the African American image produced “through the eyes of [white] others,” African Americans “can be honest” only when they remain “in their [subordinate] place,” a position well outside the bounds of the white middle-class parlor. Du Bois knew that examples of African American economic success circulated under white eyes waiting to proclaim—“usurper,” “liar,” “thief.” For many whites, the image of the successful African American was always
already an image of one who had stolen cultural prerogatives from their “rightful” owners. In other words, when projected through the eyes of white others, the image of the African American middle-class individual often transmuted into the mugshot of an African American criminal. It is precisely this transformation of the black image in the eyes of white beholders (a transformation from middle-class portrait into criminal mugshot) that Du Bois’s “American Negro” portraits unmask.

The first images displayed in Du Bois’s albums (which frame a reading of later images) replicate with striking precision the formal style of the criminal mugshot. By adapting Henry Louis Gates, Jr.’s theory of Signifying(g) to the domain of visual texts, I would like to suggest that Du Bois’s portraits “Signify upon” the formal visual codes of criminological photography. While Gates defines Signifying(g) as an African American manipulation of signs that applies primarily to verbal and to musical texts (69), I propose that one can also use this theoretical tool in reading visual media. Certainly one can identify a wide store of “received” images in U.S. culture, and one might also delineate a set of tropes or styles specific to different kinds of visual signification. While the assumed link between photographic signifier (the photograph) and photographic signified (the subject represented) may prove more tenacious than the visually arbitrary linguistic signifier, it is still possible to repeat visual codes “with a difference” (Gates 51), and thereby trouble the assumed naturalness of photographic representation. Indeed, to note briefly one well-known example, artist Cindy Sherman has reproduced iconic images from Hollywood films in order to show how meaning can be manipulated by repeating images within different interpretive frames. Sherman’s “stills” problematize Hollywood’s gendered visual strategies by over-naturalizing them, thereby destabilizing the normative power of the images she imitates.

Further, Sherman’s repetitions work not only to undermine representational strategies, but also to disrupt the posi-
tion of passive observers; her images critique dominant visual codes and engender critical observers. It is this doubly critical strategy, of denaturalizing both images and viewing positions, that Signifyin(g) upon dominant representations can effect.

In Gates’s terms, Du Bois’s photographs repeat the visual tropes of the criminal mugshot “with a difference,” directing reading of the images by “indirection” and thereby inverting the dominant significations of these particular photographic signs. Du Bois’s initial portraits portray expressionless subjects photographed from the shoulders up, both head on and in right-angle profile, repeating with uncanny precision the full-face and profile headshots of the prison record. Further, Du Bois’s photographs depict subjects posed against a plain gray background, devoid of props and frills, and reminiscent of the institutionalized walls against which legal offenders are posed. In short, the images in Du Bois’s albums repeat the formal signifiers of the criminal mugshots institutionalized in U.S. prisons and police archives in the late nineteenth century.

In replicating the formal attributes of the criminal mugshot, Du Bois was Signifyin(g) on a pervasive cultural icon. “Rogues’ Galleries” showcasing criminal mugshots for public perusal grew alongside middle-class portrait galleries from the very inception of photography. As early as 1859, the American Journal of Photography ran an article that proclaimed: “As soon as a rascal becomes dangerous to the public, he is taken to the Rogues’ Gallery, and is compelled to leave his likeness there, and from that time on he may be known to any one” (qtd. in Trachtenberg 28-29). Popular criminal archives encouraged middle-class citizens to survey the populace for social deviants and criminal intruders, those who might attempt to steal the property upon which middle-class cultural privilege largely rested. Specifically, such archives trained middle-class individuals to scrutinize the bodies of their acquaintances for “tell-tale” markers that would reveal them to be criminals in disguise. In his published Rogues’ Gallery of 1886, Professional Criminals of America, New York City chief police detective Thomas Byrnes proposes: “There is not a portrait here but has some marked characteristic by which you can identify the man who sat for it. That is what has to be studied in the Rogues’ Gallery—detail” (53). The scrutiny of physical detail encouraged by Rogues’ Galleries promulgated the myth of a successful surveillant society in turn-of-the-century U.S. culture.

The desire to look for “tell-tale” signs of hidden criminality resonated powerfully with attempts to delineate the mythological “signs of blackness” by which anxious whites hoped to identify racial passers, and thereby to reinforce a belief in the exclusive bounds of white privilege. Indeed, the systems of surveillance established by popular Rogues’ Galleries in order to stop what was deemed “criminal passing” coincided with nearly hysterical discourses of racial passing in the United States at the turn of the century. In a culture characterized both by a legacy of forced racial mixing and by heightened racial segregation, many whites viewed racial passing as a threat to their cultural privilege. The laws that equated “one drop” of “African blood” with blackness encouraged those who believed themselves to be white to scrutinize other white bodies for the imagined signs of hidden blackness. If discovered passing (wittingly or unwittingly), a white person legally defined as African American could instantly fall not only beyond the pale of society, but also into the terrain of (“negro”) criminality, as one who defied the jurisdiction of “whites only.”

By playing on the formal characteristics of the criminal mugshot, Du Bois’s photographs Signify on the surveillance under which African Americans lived in turn-of-the-century U.S. culture. More importantly,
Du Bois’s images work to trouble the power of that surveillance. The photographs begin to disrupt the authority of white observers by collapsing the distance between viewers and objects under view that is held traditionally to empower observers. Specifically, Du Bois’s photographs trouble that distance through a process of doubling. The photographs replicate a misrepresentation “with a difference,” in much the same way that Henry Louis Gates, Jr., following Bakhtin, uses the notion of the “double-voiced” word to exemplify one mode of Signifying(g) (50-51). The first few images in the albums present portraits of African Americans as mugshots; indeed, the images appear to be doubled, Signifying(g) both as middle-class portraits and as criminal mugshots simultaneously. The careful grooming of the subjects suggests a premeditated desire to be photographed typical of the middle-class portrait, while the visual patterns of close-cropped, expressionless frontal and profile poses replicate the tropes of the criminal mugshot. Through one lens, the images portray middle-class subjects, while through another they portray criminal offenders.

Du Bois’s initial images suggest that for some white viewers the portrait of an African American is ideologically equivalent to the mugshot of a criminal. Making explicit the discursive assumptions that situate African Americans beyond the pale of white society, and behind a Veil where they are invisible to white eyes blinded by racist stereotypes (Du Bois, Souls 3-4, 8), these portraits-as-mugshots make explicit the “shadow meanings” of white-supremacist images of African Americans.14 However, after this framing introduction, inaugurated by images that repeat so closely the formal style of criminal mugshots, Du Bois’s albums gradually come to resemble middle-class family albums. As viewers continue to progress through the albums, they find subjects posed increasingly in three-quarter turn, rather than in right-angle profile.
Gradually more and more of the body is represented, and subjects are supported by the stuffed chairs, patterned carpets, books, lamps, and lace draperies that signify middle-class parlors. Thus, as one moves through Du Bois’s albums, one finds that the stripped down mugshot gradually fades into the middle-class portrait.

I would like to suggest that, in situating these visual poles of identity in such close proximity, Du Bois’s albums expose the dependence of middle-class identity on the counter-image of a criminal other. Indeed, Du Bois’s photographs are unsettling because they signify at the limits of middle-class photographic portraiture. The images inhabit the very boundary that separates authorized identities from those the State deems in need of careful surveillance and discipline. As Allan Sekula has argued, the photographic portrait became the site of middle-class self-recognition precisely as the Rogues’ Gallery came to signify the boundary of respectable middle-class inclusion in the late nineteenth century. In many ways, the Rogues’ Gallery functioned as a public counterexample to the middle-class portrait gallery; analogously, the criminal body served as a point of distinction against which middle-class citizens could identify themselves. According to Sekula, “To the extent that bourgeois order depends upon the systematic defense of social relations based on private property, to the extent that the legal basis of the self lies in the model of property rights, in what has been termed ‘possessive individualism,’ every proper portrait has its lurking, objectifying inverse in the files of the police” (7). Du Bois’s photographic portraits signify across the binary that stabilizes white middle-class identity, resembling in formal pose the “mug shot” while also reproducing the accoutrements of the middle-class portrait.

Du Bois’s photographs highlight the disturbing resemblance that links the middle-class photographic portrait to the criminal mugshot, and the middle-class citizen to the criminal body. The images draw out the correspondence Thomas Byrnes suggests in his description of the Rogues’ Gallery. Through the voice of a fictional detective, Byrnes states, “‘Look through the pictures in the Rogues’ Gallery and see how many rascals you find there who resemble the best people in the country. Why, you can find some of them, I dare say, sufficiently like personal acquaintances to admit of mistaking one for the other’” (55). Linking the criminal’s middle-class appearance to a middle-class lifestyle, Byrnes declares, “‘Remember that nearly all the great criminals of the country are men who lead double lives. Strange as it may appear, it is the fact that some of the most unscrupulous rascals who ever cracked a safe or turned out a counterfeit were at home model husbands and
fathers’” (54). The imagined “double lives” of criminals passing for middle-class citizens generated an anxiety that rattled the oppositional paradigm upon which middle-class identity was established, and encouraged the surveillance I’ve discussed above. Du Bois’s doubled portraits similarly shake the assumptions upon which middle-class identity is founded by blurring the distinctions between middle-class and criminal. As we have seen, Du Bois’s photographs point toward the “doubled meanings” the African American portrait may have held for white viewers trained to distrust middle-class African Americans as usurpers of cultural privilege (that is, as always already criminals). Further, Du Bois’s images pose a critical cultural position, a place from which African Americans can gaze back at white beholders. As bell hooks reminds us, despite the historical prohibition against the black gaze, especially during slavery, African Americans have observed white people with “a critical, ‘ethnographic’ gaze” ("Representations" 167). Indeed, the eyes that look back at viewers from Du Bois’s albums (the eyes that look back from those frontal portraits) may witness the doubled lives of some of their viewers, namely of those who passed both as white middle-class citizens and as racial terrorists at the turn of the century.

While Du Bois’s photographs disrupt the binary dividing criminal from middle-class individual, they also challenge the dualism that maintains a stable white center in relation to a black margin in turn-of-the-century U.S. culture. If the middle classes consolidated their cultural legitimacy against the othered images of criminals who questioned their property rights, the white middle classes consolidated their cultural privilege not only in relation to legal offenders, but also in relation to racial others. 15 In these overlapping paradigms, an image of “negro criminality” provided a boundary that contained the cultural legitimacy of the white middle classes. Once again, it is precisely that doubled boundary that Du Bois’s photographs contest.

Reflecting On Whiteness

As Du Bois aesthetically unifies the two opposing positions of “criminal” and middle-class subject in his albums, he also closes the divide that separates images of “whiteness” from images of “blackness.” Du Bois’s portraits Signify upon the Rogues’ Gallery to connote the proximity between authorized middle-class selves and criminal others, and some of the images also reference a visual proximity between racially authorized “white” viewers and “black” objects under view. Du Bois’s portraits of white-looking biracial individuals con-

Fig. 6. From Du Bois, Types of American Negroes, Georgia, U.S.A. (1900). Reproduced from the Daniel Murray Collection, Library of Congress.
test a racial taxonomy of identifiable (because visible) otherness, and in so doing the images highlight a closeness that questions the imagined, autonomous superiority of the white viewer.

Du Bois’s images of a young, blond, very pale African American girl challenge white supremacists’ investment in separating the races by signaling an undeniable history of physical union between them. In Du Bois’s visual archive, these images create a space “for an exploration and expression of what was increasingly socially proscribed” at the turn of the century, namely social and sexual contact between the races (Carby, Reconstructing 89). As Robert Young has argued, “The ideology of race . . . from the 1840s onwards necessarily worked according to a doubled logic, according to which it both enforced and policed the differences between whites and non-whites but at the same time focused fetishistically on the product of the contacts between them” (180-81). White hysteria over the “threat” of racial passing both spurred an increased fervor in racial surveillance at the turn of the century and marked the extent to which a long history of forced racial mixing during slavery had blurred the color line of privilege in a post-slavery world.16

By the turn of the century, several states had laws that deemed one-thirty-second African or African American ancestry the key that distinguished “black” from “white,” a distinction so narrow as to make explicit the invisibility of “blackness” and “whiteness” as racial categories.17 As Mary Ann Doane has argued, the individual of mixed ancestry, “whose looks and ontology do not coincide, poses a threat to . . . the very idea of racial categorization” (235). The physical appearance of the person of mixed ancestry “always signifies a potential confusion of racial categories and the epistemological impotency of vision” (Doane 234). Individuals of mixed racial ancestry challenge visual codes of racial distinction, showing a racial taxonomy founded in visual paradigms of recognition to be a fiction, albeit a powerful one.

Du Bois’s images of white-looking African Americans resonate powerfully with the literary image of the “tragic mulatto” at the turn of the century. However, Du Bois’s photographs of biracial individuals “hardly square” with the conventional figure of “the mulatto.” As Hortense J. Spillers has argued, “Mulatto-ness, is not, fortunately, a figure of self-referentiality.” The term mulatto/a signifies “the appropriation of the interracial child by genocidal forces of dominance,” and the power of this misrepresentation lies in its ability to steal the “dynamic principle of living” from the historical subject it objectifies. In other words, the term derives its force from its capacity to objectify and to reify an
historical agent. As an image produced "through the eyes of others," "the mulatto/a" masks the presence of biracial men and women. "The 'mulatto/a, just as the 'nigger,' tells us little or nothing about the subject buried beneath them, but quite a great deal more concerning the psychic and cultural reflexes that invent and invoke them" (Spillers 166-67). As the very term mulatto "originates etymologically in notions of 'sterile mule' " (Spillers 175), it bears the traces of mid-nineteenth-century theories of racial difference that claimed to identify not only distinct racial types, but also unique racial species (Young 122-27). Despite the overwhelming evidence that individuals of mixed ancestry were not sterile, and thus not hybrids (the products of interspecies reproduction), the mythology of the "tragic mulatto/a" (who dies, and therefore does not reproduce) kept alive culturally a notion of absolute biological differences between the races.

Du Bois's "American Negro" portraits engage and disturb the "psychic and cultural reflexes" that fabricate the myth of the mulatto/a as an object in a racist taxonomy. If the mulatto/a is a racist myth, a misrepresentation that objectifies and freezes the potential force of historical actors, then the photograph of an individual of mixed racial ancestry drives a wedge in the equation that collapses a biracial individual under the sign of "the mulatto/a." In this case, the tenacity of the photograph's representation, its claim on the real, works toward a potentially radical end. If the photograph carries a trace of the historical subject it objectifies, then a photograph can depict "the mulatta type" only after first acknowledging the presence of an individual. Here, then, I am interested in the ways in which Du Bois's portraits of a white-looking girl of biracial ancestry Signify upon the racist figure of "the mulatta."

If one imagines a turn-of-the-century European or Euro-American viewer engaged in looking at the photograph of a blonde girl in Du Bois's albums, one might read this scene as a confrontation between an image of a biracial child and one who participates in maintaining the image of the mythological mulatta. As an historical subject with eyes that look back at viewers, the young girl refuses the objectifying category of "the mulatta." But what does the image of this girl make possible? According to literary scholar Ann duCille, the image of a biracial individual could enable an author "to insinuate into the consciousness of white readers the humanity of a people they otherwise constructed as subhuman—beyond the pale of white comprehension" (7-8). In thinking about white Europeans and white Americans perusing Du Bois's visual archive at the 1900 Paris Exposition, one might imagine the possibility of a kind of racial identification as those viewers turned to face the images of white-
looking African Americans in a “Negro” archive. If we suppose a positive, if only momentary, identification between viewer and viewed in this case, an identification bridged by visual signs of similarity, then such images would serve not only to humanize African Americans in the eyes of white viewers but also to suggest that self and other were very much the same.

While one can imagine this moment as one of psychological recognition, in order for the legally defined white viewer to identify with the image of a white-looking African American, to see a unified image of self in this photograph of the purported other, the viewer would have to suture over a long history of both visible and repressed violence. At the turn of the century, a superficial identification between blond Euro-American and African American subjects (on the basis of common hair color or skin tone) would have been enabled primarily by the history of violence and rape perpetuated in slavery. In this sense, then, Du Bois’s photographs of a biracial child signal both white violence upon African American bodies and an undeniable white desire for the black body. Indeed, as Robert Young describes it, colonial desire is constructed precisely around the dynamic of the colonist’s simultaneous repulsion from and attraction to the other (149-52).

This white desire for the black body, coupled with the brutal enactment of white power on that body in slavery, finds a direct corollary in turn-of-the-century lynchings. The shadow lurking behind a possible moment of visual identification between individuals divided by the color line is the image of white subjectivity foregrounded against a black corpse in the photographs of lynchings. In order to sustain an identification with African Americans, the authorized white viewer would have to confront the legacy of the utter racial divide engendered by the “new white crime” of lynching.

The photographs of lynched bodies that circulated at the turn of the century signified at the limits of white images of black otherness. As records of the lawless brutality of white supremacists, they registered a different kind of power than the mugshots procured in the police station. If the mugshot signaled a form of dispersed, institutionalized power that was implicitly white in a culture of white privilege, the photograph of a lynched black body signaled the thoroughly embodied nature of white power. By juxtaposing the photographic mugshot to the terrifying photographs of lynchings that circulated in the same years, one finds two different manifestations of white power functioning simultaneously. Lynching represents an embodiment of power similar to the sixteenth- and seventeenth-century spectacles of ritualized torture that Michel Foucault describes in Discipline and Punish. Such scenes of torture made manifest the unquestioned authority of a monarch over his subjects, the physical power of the State as personified by one ruler. The mugshot corresponds to a later formation of power which emerged in the nineteenth century, the state of surveillance, in which power is increasingly diffused, disembodied, and located in the minds of subjects who discipline themselves according to an institutionalized image of normalcy. In the coterminal juxtaposition of photographs of lynching and criminal mugshots at the turn of the century, one sees that, while the vehicle of power, the body that aligns itself with and enforces the bounds of normalcy and deviance, is absent from the photographic mugshot, those bodies that are the vehicles of a devastating physical power are represented over and over again with the victims of their wrath in the photographs of lynchings. In the images that display burned and mutilated black bodies set off by crowds of curious—even smiling—white spectators, one sees white supremacists.
attempting to locate power emphatically within the bounds of white bodies. Following artist Pat Ward Williams, one must ask: How can such images exist? Or, to state the question differently: How do the photographs of lynchers, unmasked, facing the camera, and smiling, escape the Rogues' Gallery? Such images demonstrate the extent to which power is equated with white bodies that brutalize the bodies of others. The
Photographs of lynchers and of lynching demonstrate with utter clarity that the power of whiteness was not only invisible and dispersed, but also particular and embodied, in turn-of-the-century U.S. culture.

Photographs of lynchings circulated widely, reinforcing the association of whiteness with terror in African American minds. These images served, perhaps, as the "substitute" for slavery that white supremacists, like the Harper's correspondent cited earlier, hoped would ensure the "discipline" of African Americans in post-slavery America. As Elizabeth Alexander argues, "There are countless stories of violence made spectacular in order to let black people know who was in control" (105-06). Explaining further the psychological effects of these spectacles of white violence upon the black body, Alexander states: "Black men are contained when these images are made public, at the very same time that black viewers are taking in evidence that provides grounds for collective identification with trauma" (106). This collective identification, felt and known in the body, can then become, according to Alexander, a "catalyst for action" (105). Witnessing the scenes of violence depicted in photographs can enable a first step toward African American resistance. According to Christian Walker, reclaiming "a collective historical identity" is "the first line of defense against a legacy of cultural annihilation" (69).

How do such photographs function for white viewers? Whiteness is also consolidated around these images of violence, but for whites such images enable a very different kind of racial identification. On the surface these images encourage white viewers to reject the trauma of experienced physical violence and to identify with the perpetrators of that violence. On another level, the images make absolutely apparent the fact that, as Eric Lott suggests, whiteness is a split identity formulated on the violent repression of the other (36-37). If whiteness and blackness are so violently distinguished in turn-of-the-century lynching photographs, how can we understand the possibility that white American viewers may have recognized themselves in the white-looking "other" of Du Bois's "American Negro" albums? The European or Euro-American viewer who assumes herself to be white would experience a psychological rift in such an identification, perhaps becoming momentarily conscious of the violent split that establishes white identity. In order to sustain a unified image of the visual signs that constitute superficial whiteness, the white viewer could not help but see self in other. But in this identification is also the unraveling of whiteness as a boundary between self and other, for the image of this white-looking girl is in an archive of "Negroes." Indeed, Du Bois's albums make whiteness just one point in an archive of blackness, and, specifically, they show whiteness to be the repressed point in an archive of blackness. In what one might call the larger archive of "race," whiteness is the position repressed so thoroughly that it has reproduced itself everywhere. As Richard Dyer suggests, because of its very pervasiveness, whiteness becomes an invisible racial sign (44-47): it is the (repressed) norm of unseen seeing. If the blackness produced "through the eyes of [white] others" is itself an image of whiteness, revealing more about those who produce the category than about those purportedly represented by that sign, then the self-identified white viewer must see in the violence and dismembering of the African American body the structures of white identity. For some at least, this recognition would produce a psychological rift, a split subjectivity imploding with the violent impact of sameness.

Du Bois's images of a white-looking biracial girl demonstrate the arbitrary nature of visual racial classification. This is not to suggest, of course, that Du Bois aimed to erase racial differences or to discount racial identities,
for as he himself explicitly stated: “He would not bleach his Negro soul in a flood of white Americanism, for he knows that Negro blood has a message for the world” (Souls 9). Rather, Du Bois’s photographs challenge a visual, and ultimately biological, paradigm of white supremacist racial differentiation. The violence that engenders the image of whiteness threatens always to tear it apart, so that white subjectivity remains always on the verge of fragmentation. This instability can, of course, function powerfully to perpetuate and to reinforce the image of (a volatile, vulnerable) whiteness in need of ever more aggressive consolidation. An imagined white wholeness can be recuperated quickly, out of its own fragments, by cultural privilege and the capacity to do violence. The culture at large does not force the white viewer into an identification with otherness; indeed, the culture at large works against such recognition. Yet an image of “whiteness” that is also an image of “blackness” could effect a flash of recognition in which white viewers might glimpse the phantasmatic nature of white wholeness.

W. E. B. Du Bois’s photographs of African Americans for the 1900 Paris Exposition work toward these ends, denaturalizing the assumed privilege of whiteness, and suggesting that the violent division (between “black” and “white”) upon which the myth of white wholeness is founded is itself the most entrenched of color lines.

A Note on Contemporary Viewers

The very fact that images of imagined black criminality continue to function so powerfully in the United States today, becoming all-consuming points of media fascination for white viewers, indicates that Du Bois’s photographs presented almost a century ago did not radically shift the privilege of the normative “white supremacist gaze” (hooks, “Glory” 50). However, the images did open up an important space for African American resistance to racist stereotypes, a space for contestation and for self-representation. As bell hooks has argued, “Photography has been, and is, central to that aspect of decolonization that calls us back to the past and offers a way to reclaim and renew life-affirming bonds. Using these images, we connect ourselves to a recuperative, redemptive memory that enables us to construct radical identities, images of ourselves that transcend the limits of the colonizing eye” (“Glory” 53). By reclaiming the importance of Du Bois’s “American Negro” photographs, this essay aims to expand an archive of anti-racist representations, and thereby reinforce an early foundation for the work of contemporary cultural critics.
Du Bois's photographs asked African American and white American viewers to interrogate the images of African Americans produced "through the eyes of [white] others," and thereby to question the foundations of white privilege. Whether or not Du Bois's first viewers engaged his images at this level, witnessing the critique of whiteness embedded in his Signifying(g) practices, is now, perhaps, beside the point. Given the state of contemporary visual culture, it is time, once again, for viewers to confront Du Bois's images, and to do so by reading them self-consciously, with a "productive look." According to Kaja Silverman, "Productive looking necessarily requires a constant conscious reworking of the terms under which we unconsciously look at the objects that people our visual landscape. It necessitates the struggle, first, to recognize our involuntary acts of incorporation and repudiation, and our implicit affirmation of the dominant elements of the screen, and, then, to see again, differently. However, productive looking necessarily entails, as well, the opening up of the unconscious to otherness" (184). As this essay has suggested, an opening up of the unconscious to otherness would necessitate a profound disorientation for white viewers whose image of white wholeness is founded upon the repression of violent othering practices. Nevertheless, it is precisely this kind of interrogation of the psychological and cultural structures that enable the continuation of white dominance that needs to be undertaken if we are to continue Du Bois's project of pushing subjectivity past the color line.

Notes

1. My sincere thanks to Laura Wexler for encouraging me to pursue this argument, and to Joe Masco for carefully reading and commenting on several drafts of this essay. I am very grateful for the support I have received to continue my ongoing research on these images from an External Research Fellowship at the Center for the Humanities at Oregon State University and an Irene Diamond Foundation Fellowship at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture.

Throughout this essay I occasionally refer to the images Du Bois collected for the "American Negro" exhibit at the 1900 Paris Exposition as "Du Bois's photographs." I would like to clarify that Du Bois himself probably did not produce any of the photographs assessed here; the photographers who made these images are not cited in the albums. However, while Du Bois may not have actually taken the photographs he collected, as archivist and presenter of the images he played a central role in shaping the meaning of the photographs, in producing the narrative the images would collectively convey. Du Bois himself was awarded a gold medal for his role as "Collaborator and Compiler of Georgia Negro Exhibit" by the Paris Exposition judges (Lewis 247).

2. Du Bois's photograph albums have not yet received extensive critical attention. In discussing the American Negro exhibit, scholars generally address the more famous Hampton photographs, produced by Frances Benjamin Johnston for the 1900 Paris Exposition. For further information on Johnston's photographs, see Davidov; Guimond; Przyblyski; Smith; and Wexler.

3. This collection of Du Bois's papers is housed in the Prints and Photographs Division of the Library of Congress.

4. The American Negro exhibit at the Paris Exposition of 1900 was one of the first of its kind, a new international African American forum inaugurated in 1895 with the "Negro Building" at the Cotton States International Exposition in Georgia. The first formal display of African American art, technology, and culture at the Cotton States Exposition made international news in 1895, and it was celebrated with a famous address by Booker T. Washington, later deemed the "Atlanta Compromise" speech. While Du Bois's subsequent participation in the Paris Exposition of 1900 was not nearly so prominent as that of Washington's at the Atlanta Exposition, it nevertheless marked a parallel attempt by Du Bois to represent and to shape the history of African American social advancement, and U.S. racial relations, at a moment when Washington and Du Bois were becoming increasingly polarized ideologically. While Du Bois initially congratulated Washington on his address at the Atlanta
Exposition, he soon thereafter began to take an increasingly oppositional stance to Washington’s program of slow economic advancement, arguing instead for the immediate recognition of African American legal, political, and social rights (Rampersad 63-65).

5. Du Bois first made this declaration at the Pan-African Association’s conference in London in July 1900 (Marable 197; Rampersad 64). He would later repeat this famous statement in The Souls of Black Folk (3).

6. Editorials and letters to the editor published in Harper’s Weekly in the first years of the twentieth century deem the rape of white women a “new negro crime.” In an editorial entitled “The Negro Problem and the New Negro Crime,” for the 20 June 1903 volume of Harper’s Weekly, a writer discusses “the so-called ‘new’ negro crime, by which is meant the crime against white women” (1050). Similarly, in “Some Fresh Suggestions about the New Negro Crime,” in the Harper’s Weekly of 23 January 1904, the editor proclaims, “The assault of white women by colored men may fairly be described as the ‘new negro crime’” (120). See also letters to the editor from George B. Winton and Mrs. W. H. Felton.

7. Ida B. Wells’s anti-lynching work is documented in Crusade for Justice, A Red Record, and Southern Horrors. Von Ware (167-224, 179), Hazel Carby (Reconstructing 115; “Threshold” ), and Paula Giddings (26) follow Ida B. Wells in assessing lynching as a form of economic terrorism. For additional analyses of Ida B. Wells’s radical work, see Bederman.

8. Apparently Olivier made these comments first in the British Friend, December 1904.

9. In “Some Fresh Suggestions about the New Negro Crime,” a Harper’s Weekly editor links “the new negro crime” to “the talk of social equality that inflames the negro, unregulated and undisciplined” (121). This same writer also links the disfranchisement of African Americans in Mississippi to the eradication of “the new negro crime” in that state (121). Many whites upheld Mississippi as a case study that demonstrated the imagined link between social equality and “negro criminality,” and it is plain how such arguments fueled movements to disfranchise African American men. See also “The New Negro Problem and the New Negro Crime” (1050).

10. Coco Fusco also utilizes Gates’s theory of Signifyin(g) in her analysis of Lorna Simpson’s photographic art (100).

11. Sander L. Gilman offers a fascinating comparative analysis of this kind in “Black Bodies, White Bodies: Toward an Iconography of Female Sexuality in Late Nineteenth-Century Art, Medicine, and Literature.”

12. For a recent analysis of Cindy Sherman’s Untitled Film Stills, see Kaja Silverman’s The Threshold of the Visible World (207-27).

13. Gates’ definition of Signifyin(g) is much more complicated, and much more encompassing, than I have described it here. Repetition with a difference and direction by indirection are simply two of the important ways that Signifyin(g) works, according to Gates (51, 63-68, 74-79, 81, 85-86).

14. For an analysis of verbal shadow meanings, see Gates (46).

15. In his important analysis of The Jazz Singer, Michael Rogin demonstrates how ethnic white identities were Americanized, and further “whitened,” through white-black conflict (420).

16. On the institutionalized rape of African American slave women in the antebellum South, and the representations of white and black womanhood that ideologically supported that rape, see Aptheker; Caraway; Carby, Reconstructing 20-61; Davis; Giddings; and hooks, Ain’t.

17. Susan Gilman provides an important analysis of this “predicament” for white supremacists in her essay on Mark Twain’s Pudd’nhead Wilson (205). According to Barbara J. Fields, “The very diversity and arbitrariness of the physical rules governing racial classification prove that the physical emblems which symbolize race are not the foundation upon which race arises as a category of social thought” (151). See also Samira Kawash’s work on passing, in which she describes “the color line” as “a social system of classification and identification that insisted on an absolute difference between white and black, even as it warily acknowledged the existence of certain bodies that seemed to violate the very possibility of distinction” (124).

18. I am adapting Robert Young’s insights about the power of the cultural construction of “race” to my understanding of the literary figure of the “tragic mulatto/a.” According to Young, “The different Victorian scientific accounts of race each in their turn quickly became deeply problematic; but what was much more consistent, more powerful and long-lived, was the cultural construction of race” (93-94).

19. For a compelling reading of the convergence of “specular” and “panoptic” power in both antebellum slavery and postbellum lynching, see Robyn Wiegman’s American Anatomies (35-42). One refinement I would make in Wiegman’s fascinating analysis is simply to note that, in most of the photographs of Lynch mobs and their victims, white spectators are, remarkably, not veiled or masked.
Thus, I would suggest that it was not only a "homogenized, known-but-never-individuated" form of white power that lynching reproduced (Wiegman 39) but also an explicitly embodied form of white power that marked white men and women as the particular bearers of an otherwise diffuse power.

20. Pat Ward Williams’s 1987 art piece Accused / Blowtorch / Padlock is included in Lucy R. Lippard’s Mixed Blessings. According to Lippard, “Williams examines not only the act of lynching but [also] the act of photographing that act.” The handwritten text which frames a four-part, window-framed image of an African American man chained to a tree in torture, partially reads: “’Life Magazine published this picture. Who took this picture? Couldn’t he just as easily let the man go? Did he take his camera home and then come back with a blowtorch? . . . Life answers—page 141—not credit. Somebody do something’ ” (37). Elizabeth Alexander also examines Williams’s piece in her compelling essay “’Can you be BLACK and look at this?’ Reading the Rodney King Video(s).” Deborah Willis asks similar questions in her discussion of Whipped at Post, c.1880s, in “Introduction: Picturing Us” (20-23).

21. For an analysis of “the representation of whiteness as terrifying,” see hooks, “Representations” 169.

22. See Michel Foucault, The History of Sexuality, Vol. I, for a discussion of how “repression” works to perpetuate a proliferation of discourses around the objects or acts it would seem to deny.

23. Kaja Silverman defines the “productive look” as a means of looking that is not completely predetermined by cultural paradigms or even by material objects under view. For Silverman, the “productive look” is a transformative look, a means of seeing beyond the “screen” of cultural programming (180-93).

Works Cited


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—. "In Our Glory: Photography and Black Life." Willis, Picturing 42-52.


