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Re-envisioning African American Motherhood in Two Nineteenth-Century Women's Photographic Albums

author:
Mary Trent

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The article examines how nineteenth-century African American women used photographic albums to re-envision Black motherhood, challenging dominant stereotypes and establishing narratives of family, respectability, and social connection. Focusing on the albums of Ellen Craft – a formerly enslaved woman and abolitionist – and Arabella Chapman – a freeborn, middle-class educator – the essay explores how these mothers curated images of family, friends, and prominent public figures to document kinship ties and social networks that reflect financial stability and middle-class values. These visual choices directly counteract racist caricatures of Black mothers as unfit, instead portraying them as dignified matriarchs and community builders. The albums also serve as intergenerational records, with daughters and granddaughters adding their own images and notations, thereby preserving and honoring maternal legacies. The discovery of photographs shared between their albums enlightens a previously unknown familial connection between Craft and Chapman, illustrating how photographic albums not only recorded but also maintained bonds. By situating these albums within broader photographic and social history, the article demonstrates that African American mothers' album-making was a powerful act of resistance and self-definition. Ultimately, these albums are shown to be living documents that offered affirmative visions of Black motherhood across generations, countering historical narratives of disempowerment, degradation, and loss.

Mary Trent - Assistant Professor of Art and Architectural History at the College of Charleston. Her research focuses on identity in American and African American fine art and photography, including ways marginalized figures have used art and media to critique dominant narratives and better

represent their lived realities.

Re-envisioning African American Motherhood in Two Nineteenth-Century Women's Photographic Albums

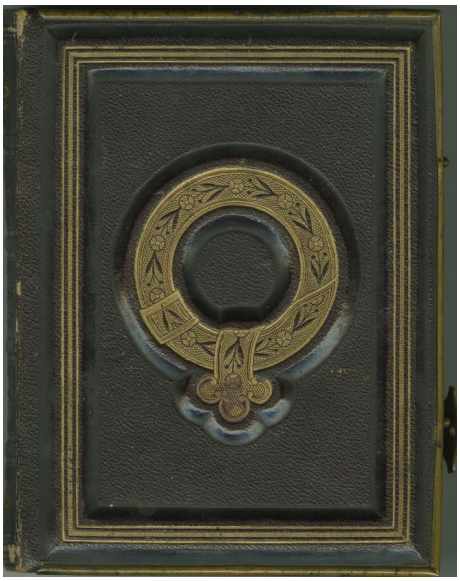

Fig. 1 Ellen Craft album, ca. 1860s–1900s. Leather cover, metal clasps, and gilded pages. Courtesy Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

Nineteenth-century middle-class African American mothers' photographic albums document and preserve bonds of kinship and friendship that speak to their creators' rejection of period stereotypes about Black motherhood. Photographic scholarship has illuminated how nineteenth-century Black women used photography to visualize freedom and make political statements.[1] Studies have also addressed how nineteenth-century African American women adopted European and Euro-American period ideals of respectable femininity as part of a larger project of racial uplift.

This scholarship has primarily focused on published literature, periodicals, and public speeches.[2] My essay argues that African American women, especially middle-class mothers, also used the more private materials of photographic albums as a tangible record of their success in building stable families. Their albums re-envisioned motherhood away from the physical and psychological degradations of enslavement, especially sexual violence and forced family separation. Instead, their collections of photographs demonstrated Black mothers as advancing the race by rearing educated, sophisticated contributors to society.

Fig. 2 Arabella Chapman Album 1, 1878–ca. 1900s. Leather cover, metal clasps, and gilded pages. Courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

Nineteenth-century albums made by African American women in public archives are rare. This essay will consider examples made by Ellen Craft (1826–1891) and Arabella Chapman (1859–1927) that are housed in The Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture in Charleston, South Carolina and The University of Michigan William L. Clements Library in Ann Arbor, Michigan, respectively (figs. 1–2). Building on my earlier research into how Craft's and Chapman's albums visualize freedom, this paper argues that the albums affirm Black motherhood.[3] Craft was a light-skinned woman who escaped enslavement and became well known in abolitionist circles in the United States and England. Chapman was born free in New Jersey and became the first woman of color to graduate from Albany, New York's public high school.

Both albums demonstrate careful attention to the social and performative aspects of photography. Their subjects are invariably well dressed and dignified, often posed in settings that connote financial comfort and elevated social status. Additionally, their albums include annotations indicating that photographs were traded between friends and family members, and that the albums themselves were passed down through female generations. Such choices emphasized Craft's and Chapman's success in fostering respectable and stable family and community life, including its remembrance and memorialization.

When these albums were first donated to public archives, memories of the link between Craft and Chapman had faded.[4] However, as this essay will demonstrate, their albums preserve an otherwise forgotten connection between the two women. Craft and Chapman were, in fact, distantly related cousins by marriage. The albums' ability to revive this long-forgotten association illustrates how African American women's albums fortified links between family members, especially women, whose relationships might otherwise be considered historically insignificant. They also demonstrate the vital role of mothers in recording the networks of family and friends whose historical relationships would else have been lost to time.

Visualizing the self in photographic albums

As one of the most inexpensive and widespread modes of visually recording daily life, photographic albums are a global archive of social history representing diverse racial, ethnic, and sexual identities, genders, social classes, nationalities, and ages. A blank photographic album is a space wherein it is possible to add photographs, mementos, and notations that record a personal history. Selecting and arranging images and ephemera, album-makers re-transcribe and re-orient memories of daily life for themselves and others which visualize identities and narratives that may have otherwise been stereotyped or marginalized in public media.[5]

Photographic scholarship has often overlooked albums, relegating them to minor status due to their association with domesticity and women's history. However, pioneering research by female scholars has highlighted albums' significance in critical social narratives that move beyond the strictly visual. Martha Langford's seminal work emphasized albums as an oral tradition, prioritizing spoken narratives over visual aesthetics.[6] Patrizia Di Bello explored tactility in album creation, linking it to feminine domestic experiences.[7] Studies of photographic albums

have often focused on White, middle-class women's perspectives, yet marginalized groups have also used album-making strategies to express complex identities, and recent scholarship has begun attending to a broader field of albums made by diverse individuals.[8] Deborah Willis's groundbreaking scholarship has been significant for identifying how African American vernacular photography challenges stereotypes and asserts agency in self-representation.[9]

The nineteenth-century invention of photography enabled African Americans to visualize themselves as self-possessed, dignified individuals, as exemplified in the widespread photographs of Frederick Douglass and Sojourner Truth.[10] Douglass, the most photographed nineteenth-century American, valued the seemingly more neutral effects of photographic portraits over painted renderings, arguing that White artists could not avoid stereotyping Black physiognomy: "Negroes can never have impartial portraits at the hands of white artists."[11] These famous, formerly enslaved individuals circulated photographs of themselves, now posed as dignified and self-possessed, to a broad public. Yet African Americans also employed photographs more privately, within their own families and homes, to assert their identity and social bonds to themselves.[12]

The practice of album-making was gendered and classed in nineteenth-century America, typically falling within the sphere of middle- and upper-class women's domestic responsibilities. In the visual culture of the time, middle-class African American women faced a profound challenge: how to assert their humanity and dignity in the face of pervasive racist stereotypes and systemic oppression. Nineteenth-century popular media such as minstrel shows and trade card advertisements consistently reduced Black women to caricatures of uneducated, happily servile mammies or hypersexualized Jezebels.[13] Black mothers were stereotyped as lacking the refinement of their White,

middle- and upper-class counterparts, which resulted in their supposed rearing of unruly children.[14] Black mothers were also not readily included in America's sanctified vision of the domestic sphere in which White mothers were invaluable cultivators of the next generation's virtuous, well-informed citizens. In this context, African American women had to navigate racial, gender, and social class stereotypes and expectations.[15]

Before the introduction of the photographic album, Black Americans circulated friendship albums, which were blank books decorated with sentimental verses and drawings. Historian Jasmine Nichole Cobb argues that these women used such albums to craft an "optics of respectability" across social networks.[16] Through the careful curation, annotation, and preservation of photographs in albums, African American women also used photographic albums to challenge dominant narratives and assert their complex identities and social networks. They also demonstrate how African American mothers revisualized Black motherhood as a valued position of family and community leadership that replaced painful historical memories of women's and mothers' disempowerment under enslavement.

Ellen Craft's album of emancipation

Craft and her husband William (1824–1900) escaped enslavement in 1848, voyaging from Georgia to Philadelphia and then Boston. Light-skinned, Craft escaped by pretending to be "William Johnson," a White enslaver, and her husband disguised himself as her enslaved manservant. In their youth, they had each been forcibly separated from their own parents, and they did not want to birth children into enslavement who might in turn be forcibly separated from them.[17]

Fig. 3 James Grant Macandrew, *Untitled (Young Ellen Craft)*, ca. 1860s. Albumen print, from the Ellen Craft album. Courtesy Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

The Crafts had to undertake a second escape after the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, which emboldened slaveholders to capture escapees in the North and return them to enslavement in the South. Fleeing Boston and settling in England, they were supported by several prominent abolitionists, and by 1860, they both were literate and carrying on written correspondence with friends across the Atlantic. In England, they also wrote and published a book-length account of their experiences, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom*.[18]

Craft's album is 15 ¼cm x 11½cm x 5cm and its fifty pages contain forty-seven images.[19] The album holds depictions of Craft, her family, friends, acquaintances, and notable public figures. Most are *cartes de visite* [visiting cards], a type of inexpensive studio photograph that predated snapshot photographs and was commonly exchanged in the mid-to-late nineteenth century. Craft also included tintypes and a few print clippings.

For Craft, who had used visual performance as part of her escape from slavery by disguising herself as a White male slaveholder, the ability to control her own image through photography held special significance. Her photographic portraits in the album demonstrate her understanding of the need to perform respectability once free of slavery, for both her and her family's sake. In London, she posed for a *carte de visite* likely taken when she was in early middle age (fig. 3). A well-dressed woman posed at ease, resting her hands on a tufted chair, she presents herself as a proper matriarch of middle-class

domestic space, not a laborer within it.[20] She likely traded this card socially and in correspondence, as the image counteracted stereotypes about the enslaved or formerly enslaved and was thus vital for her and her family's advancement in their new social sphere.[21]

As a very light-skinned Black woman, Craft's body was marked by the histories of sexual violence her enslaved maternal ancestors experienced at the hands of their enslavers.[22] Craft's album suggests she was sensitively aware of the multi-layered meanings of her fair skin. She included in her album a well-known abolitionist *carte de visite* taken in 1864 by Charles Paxton of Rebecca, a slave girl from New Orleans (fig. 4). Rebecca and other people emancipated from slavery during the Civil War toured the North as minor celebrities to raise funds for schools for the formerly enslaved. Like Craft, Rebecca was the daughter of her enslaver and could pass as White, which troubled entrenched notions of racial difference. The racial enigma of young women like Craft and Rebecca especially astonished and drew the sympathies and support of Northern abolitionists.[23] Craft may thus have found resonance in Rebecca's story and included her image to mark this connection. Both women's light skin was read as a shameful manifestation of sexual victimhood under enslavement, befitting the trope of the "tragic mulatto" figure.[24] Yet their skin also enabled them to better code

Fig. 4 Charles Paxton, *A Slave Girl from New Orleans*, 1864. Albumen print, from the Ellen Craft album. Courtesy Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

within the (implicitly White) visual expectations of nineteenth-century womanhood.

Noliwe Rooks reveals how many late-nineteenth-century middle-class African American women re-signified their light skin from a marker of enslaver rape to an indication of elite status that they also believed could help them uplift the race. Magazines like *Ringwood's Afro-American Journal of Fashion* advised their middle-class, often lighter-skinned readership on their ability to perform expectations for elite femininity that derived from period notions about White womanhood.

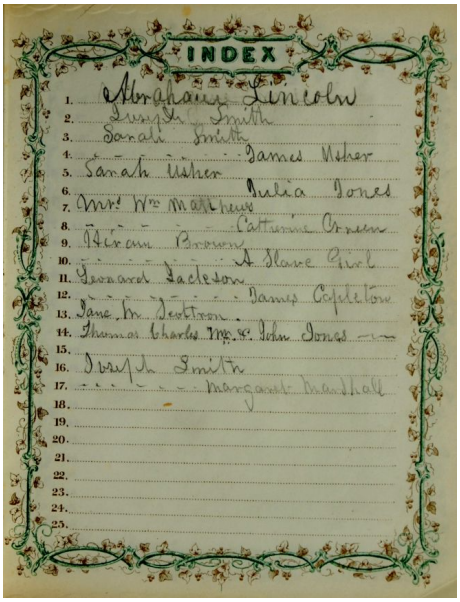

Fig. 5 Index to Album 1, from the Arabella Chapman albums. Courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

Their readers were given images of White fashion models and taught how to dress modishly and comport themselves with modesty, to "show or prove that we were real women – ladies."[25] These acts were meant to distinguish them from popular stereotypes about Black women as morally, socially, and hygienically depraved due to the irreparable damages of enslavement.[26] Rooks argues that these women's seeming disavowal of the importance of sexual violence to their and their female ancestors' history was, in fact, a strategy of hiding in plain sight the harrowing truths that weighed heavily on their inner lives: "In short, rape and violence were refashioned and rewritten, though not forgotten."[27]

Fig. 6 Unknown, *Untitled (African American woman holding White child)*, ca. 1855. Ambrotype. Courtesy The Library of Congress, Washington, D.C.

Interestingly, the index at the beginning of one of Arabella Chapman's albums lists the inclusion of an image of "A Slave Girl" (fig. 5). The image was already removed when the album reached the University of Michigan, so we do not know who it depicted. However, for a freeborn Northerner like Chapman, it seems likely that it might have been one of the popular *cartes de visite* of emancipated, usually light-skinned slaves like Rebecca that circulated widely among abolitionists during and after the Civil War, rather than an image of a specific enslaved person related to Chapman. One would also expect Chapman to have identified the individual's name in the index if she was personally known to her. More likely, the unnamed girl stood as a symbolic representation of enslaved women in general. Her presence in the album suggests that Chapman, like Craft, may have identified with the enslaved girl, even though she herself had been born into relative privilege and freedom. Though Chapman's and Craft's albums present images of respectable, educated, fashionable women and their families, their inclusion of photographs of enslaved women suggests the influence of painful historical legacies of enslavement on their and their families' inner lives and identities, which informed their choice to enact the codes of elite respectability as a survival strategy.

Fig. 7 Unknown, *Untitled (Ellen Craft and younger women)*, ca. late 1880s–1900s. Tintype, from the Ellen Craft album. Courtesy Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

The relationship between photography and freedom was particularly significant for formerly enslaved people like Craft. Under slavery, African Americans were rarely photographed, and when they were, they were typically represented as property or ethnographic specimens.[28] Enslaved nurses were often required to pose in photographs with the White children whom they cared for, in what the cultural historian Matthew Fox-Amato has called "chattel Madonna" imagery (fig. 6). These images erased the women's status as mothers to their own children to emphasize their roles as supposedly contented Black caretakers of White children.[29] In freedom, however, Craft could document herself as a beloved mother and caretaker of future generations, as she did in a tintype showing herself seated with four younger African American women, possibly including her daughter Ellen Craft Crum (1866–1917) and several daughters-in-law (fig. 7). Seated in front of a painted backdrop on the right, Craft is positioned to appear as if she is at home tending the hearth. On the left, the next generation of young women stand against a backdrop of flowering trees, symbolically blossoming in the wider world.[30] The image contradicts the ever-present threat of family separation under slavery, presenting a stable, intergenerational family group led by a strong matriarch.

The album's commemoration of motherhood is also inscribed onto a tintype of Craft's youngest son, Alfred (1870–1939), who is respectably dressed in a suit and tie (fig. 8). Signed in fine handwriting on the bottom is a statement from Craft's eldest son, Charles (1852–1938): "To my dear mother as a token of love and remembrance from her dutiful son Charlie." Craft inserted the image in her album with both Alfred's image and Charles's signature visible. Her well-dressed, -mannered, and -educated sons honor their mother and exemplify her maternal achievements.[31]

Fig. 8 Unknown, *Untitled (Alfred Craft)*, ca. 1880s–1890s. Tintype, from the Ellen Craft album. Courtesy Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

Craft's album includes photographs of her children, a grandchild, and her in-laws, along with photographs of friends, fellow abolitionists, and notable public figures. The album demonstrates her successful cultivation of a network of social support for her family. It also allowed her to share her memories with future generations, who took care of the album for a century and a half after her passing. It thus also demonstrates the bonds between generations.

Arabella Chapman's albums of respectability

Chapman was one generation younger than Craft, born in 1859 into a middle-class family of free people of color in New Jersey. In her early childhood, her family resettled to Albany, New York, where her father was appointed head waiter at an upscale hotel, an elite position for an African American man at the time. Chapman attended local public schools and became the first African American woman to enroll and graduate

from Albany Free Academy, the city's first public high school. Chapman then worked as a music teacher for several years before marrying a hotel waiter, Clarence B. Miller (1862–1932). Clarence and Arabella moved to North Adams, Massachusetts, and together raised three children.[32]

Chapman and Craft inhabited similar social tiers as members of solidly middle-class, educated, elite African American families. Both families held a certain amount of comparable economic advantage, valued education, and were active in Republican politics. Arabella's brother, John T. Chapman (1861–1926), was a Republican party activist.[33] And Craft's daughter, also named Ellen Craft, married William Demos Crum (1859–1912), a prominent Charleston African American physician, community leader, and active Republican who, in 1902, during Jim Crow, was nominated by President Theodore Roosevelt as Collector of the Port of Charleston. This symbolically important appointment generated national controversy.[34] In many ways, Chapman's album is almost a sequel to Craft's, made by another African American matriarch, one generation younger.

Fig. 9 Unknown, *Untitled (Sophie McDowell)*, ca. 1870s–1880s. Albumen print, from the Ellen Craft album. Courtesy Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

Fig. 10 The Andusare Studio (Charleston, SC), *Untitled (Harry Craft)*, ca. 1880s. Albumen print, from the Ellen Craft album. Courtesy Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

Chapman's two albums are each 16cm x 13cm x 5cm and hold ninety-five photographs in total. The photographs include *cartes de visite* and tintypes, along with handwritten notations on some of the pages indicating the sitters' names and associations. Like Craft's, Chapman's albums exhibit her family as enmeshed in larger social circles. Chapman's albums also include the same,

widely reproduced images of Abraham Lincoln and Frederick Douglass that Craft's album also holds.[35] These convergences suggest that although Craft and Chapman lived at a great distance and were members of successive generations, they were participants in the same "imagined community" of middle-class African Americans proudly associating their families with the same figureheads of freedom.[36] Craft and Chapman shared an investment in presenting their families' status as connected to anti-slavery politicians and activists.

If the photographs of Lincoln and Douglass were the only shared images between the albums, there would be no specific reason to expect a direct link between Chapman and Craft. After all, many nineteenth-century Americans kept photographs of Lincoln and Douglass in their albums.[37] Yet Craft's and Chapman's albums also hold two of the same family photographs, indicating that the women's social circles overlapped. Copies of two Craft family *cartes de visite* are found in both Craft's album and in one of Chapman's albums. Both albums include the same photograph of a small baby and identical photographs of a very light-skinned Black woman in a bust-length vignette with two large, hand-tinted pink bows (figs. 9–10). Additionally, the larger Craft family archive contains daguerreotypes of a woman whose *carte de visite*

Fig. 11 Unknown, *Untitled (Emeline Smith Aubin Kinloch)*, ca. 1870s–1884. Ambrotype. Courtesy Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.
Fig. 12 Unknown, *Untitled (Ms. Smith's Sister)*, ca. 1870s–1884. Albumen print, from the Arabella Chapman albums. Courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.
Fig. 13 Unknown, *Untitled (Ms. Smith)*, ca. 1870s–1880s. Tintype, from the Arabella Chapman albums. Courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.
Fig. 14 Unknown, *Untitled (Arabella Chapman)*, ca. 1870s–1880s. Tintype, from the Arabella Chapman albums. Courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

is included in Arabella's album (figs. 11–12).

One would not have expected Craft's and Chapman's albums to share private photographs of non-famous individuals. Chapman was thirty-five years younger than Craft and lived in New York and Massachusetts. Craft began her album while living in England and brought it back to the United States after the Civil War when she settled in Georgia and South Carolina. Yet these albums' surprising linkage demonstrates how such books preserve bonds even long after living memory has faded.

The connection between Craft and Chapman is through Craft's daughter-in-law, Emeline Aubin Kinloch Craft (1853–1941), who married Craft's son Charles (1852–1938) and inherited the album from Craft.[38] Emeline added her photographs to the collection, including images of herself, family, and friends, suggesting that she viewed the album as a repository for her memories and for Craft's. Her sister Sophia Kinloch McDowell (1850–1924) is the woman with the pink bows, whose photograph is in both Craft's and Chapman's albums (fig. 9). The baby may be one of Emeline's children (fig. 10). Emeline Craft's mother was Emeline Smith Aubin Kinloch (1824–1884), who is pictured in the daguerreotype in the Craft family archives and the *carte de visite* in Chapman's album (figs. 11–12). Emeline and her mother were both from Charleston, South Carolina, where the Crafts settled in their final years along with their son Charles. However, the younger Emeline also lived with relatives in Albany, New York, for a short period in the late 1870s and early 1880s, when Arabella was also living there.

Albany resident Joseph Aubin Smith (1832–1899) had been born in Charleston and was the brother of the elder Emeline.[39] His photo is included in Arabella's album. The younger Emeline thus likely resided with her uncle Joseph and his wife Sarah Smith (1821–1909) during her time in Albany. Sarah is also represented in Arabella's album (fig. 13). Sarah may have been the grandmother of Arabella's husband, Clarence Miller.[40] Hence,

Arabella and Emeline appear to be distant cousins by marriage.

Arabella and Emeline would both have been unmarried in their twenties while living in Albany in the 1870s and early 1880s. Emeline kept an autograph book from this time that is signed by many individuals whose photographs also sit in Arabella's album, including Arabella herself, her father John Chapman, husband Clarence, Sarah Smith, and Joseph Aubin Smith. The two women thus seem to have forged a friendship in their young adulthood as members of the same social and familial circles before Emeline returned to Charleston, where she would marry Craft's son. Over the years and across a great distance, they likely maintained their connections by exchanging photographs in the mail, which they kept in their albums.[41]

The portraits of Arabella, Emeline, and Sophia – each a generation younger than Craft – suggest that they, like Craft, navigated the demands of the optics of respectability while supporting each other and maintaining connections. In their portraits, the women used photography to negotiate the demands for displaying feminine beauty, middle-class status, and Christian piety. A portrait of Chapman as a young woman from her album presents her as comported and well dressed (fig. 14). She sits in a portrait studio before a scenic landscape backdrop. Her clothing and demeanor suggest reserve and propriety. Her gaze is indirect, and she wears a modest, long, buttoned-down gown with a high neck. She has parted her hair down the middle and pulled it back. Her accessories include earrings, a metal bracelet, and a pocket

Fig. 15 Unknown, *Untitled (Emeline Aubin Kinloch Craft)*, ca. 1870s–1880s. Albumen print, from the Ellen Craft album. Courtesy Avery Research Center for African American History and Culture, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC.

watch that rests in her breast pocket with a chain attached. She sits on a plush stool with a soft, tasseled armrest whose thick fringe elicits a sense of tactility, and her cheeks are warmed by being painted rosy.

A portrait of Emeline from the forty-third page of Craft's album presents the young woman in an elegant dress with two long curls of her hair draping over her shoulder (fig. 15). The satiny fabric of her dress, her soft hair, and her skin all suggest a feminine sensuality. Yet her high-neck, off-set gaze, and an earring in the shape of a cross suggest the propriety of an upper-middle-class Christian woman of the era.

Sophia's portrait (which is shared across the two albums) presents her from the chest up in vignette. She also projects propriety, elegance, and restraint. Her hair is parted down the middle and pulled back, and her dress is high-necked. Yet her portrait adds the flourishes of two hand-tinted pink bows and a pair of dangling, gilded earrings (fig. 9). These Black women of similar ages and social, economic, and educational levels shared these respectable photographs with each other. By doing so, they affirmed their connections and visualized support.

Rearing healthy, educated, well-mannered children was also vital to Black women's respectability, especially for the generation raising children after Reconstruction. Magazines like *Ringwood's* encouraged mothers to maintain clean homes, bathe their children regularly, and teach them Christian virtues. They were advised to occupy themselves and their children with music, games, and books, and refuse alcohol and loud public behavior.[42] Conduct and etiquette books argued that a Black mother's role in

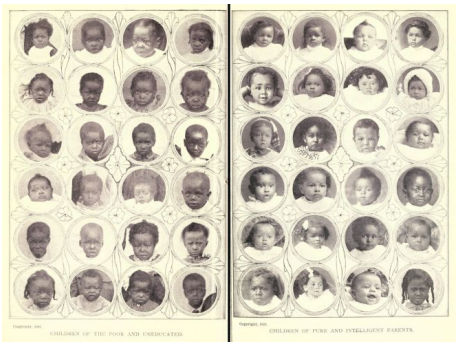

Fig. 16 *Children of the Poor and Uneducated* and *Children of Pure and Intelligent Parents*, published from Prof. and Mrs. John William Gibson, *Golden Thoughts on Chastity and Procreation: Heredity and Prenatal Influences* (Naperville, IL: J. L. Nichols and Co., 1903).

structuring the home determined whether her children would grow up to be productive members of their community and exemplars of the race or, instead, turn to crime and degeneracy.

One guidebook illustrated parental success or failure with photographs of young children. "Children of the Poor and Uneducated" and "Children of Pure and Intelligent Parents" present two grids of twenty-four close-up photographic portraits of young children (fig. 16). Children from the first group do not smile. Several have furrowed brows and wear simple clothes. Children in the second group have more elite clothing and accessories, including several elaborate bows. A few of them smile, and one baby even laughs. The second group also has a wider variety of skin tones and hair textures, indicating more mixed African and European ancestry. This guidebook's illustrations suggest that photographs of healthy, lighthearted children demonstrate a mother's success in transcending the past degradations of bondage forced upon women and families. In contrast, images of distressed children doomed for futures of vice would suggest her failure to escape passing on the legacies of enslavement.

The photographs of babies and young children in Craft's and Chapman's albums visualize period codes of maternal success in child-rearing like those illustrated in the guidebook. Their albums hold several photographs of stylishly dressed, immaculately clean, healthy and well-fed babies and young children. For example, the photograph of a baby that sits in both women's albums presents a plump child dressed in a fine white gown with a lively expression and a full head of shiny, ringleted hair (fig. 10).

Fig. 17 Unknown, *Untitled (Claribel)*, ca. early 1890s. Tintype, from the Arabella Chapman albums. Courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

Arabella's albums include images of her children, such as the tintype of her daughter Claribel as a baby (fig. 17). Claribel is healthy and has chubby cheeks. She wears a large white gown and bonnet and sits on what is meant to appear as a dark chair. However, it is probably her mother covered in cloth, soothing the baby and helping hold her still for the camera. This is an example of the nineteenth- and early twentieth-century trend of "hidden mother" photographs, in which mothers draped themselves in cloth or blocked themselves with furniture while holding their child during the image's exposure.[43] The photograph of Emeline's child may also be an example: the prop on the left side of the image could conceal a mother's supporting arm (fig. 10). Images like these prioritize the child, yet also indicate the importance of the mother's body and calming touch to support them and enable their success in posing for the camera. Though such images purportedly hide the mother (albeit not very well), the photographs emphasize the intimate bodily bonds between mother and baby, and demonstrate the mother's

success in her supportive role during these crucial early years.[44]

As the children grow, they will no longer need their mother's hidden presence to support them. Instead, they can be photographed on their own (as many older children are in the albums) and can pose in group portraits with their older relatives. One image presents Arabella and her sister Alfarata standing behind Arabella's three seated school-aged children (fig. 18). The album's caption indicates that the tintype was taken at Pleasure Island, an amusement park near Albany. Everyone is dressed fashionably in fine clothes and hats. The children sit close to each other, holding their backs straight and folding their hands neatly in their laps. They demonstrate elegant comportment and manners. Together, the family evinces intimacy and respectability. The group portrait speaks to Arabella's maternal success in fostering family togetherness and pride.

Fig. 18. Unknown, *Untitled (Pleasure Island, Ma Miller, 3 kids, and Alfarata)*, ca. 1890s–1900s. Tintype, from the Arabella Chapman albums. Courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

The albums also include photographs of Chapman with her parents. One tintype depicts Chapman herself, her father John R. Chapman, and her brother John T. Chapman (fig. 19). The siblings stand on either side of their seated father, in front of a painted backdrop representing a countryside scene. The three demonstrate their middle-class status and respectability with fashionable, formal clothing and hats. Additionally, they emphasize their familial closeness and harmony via intimate touch, with each child comfortably resting a hand on their

father's back.

The legacies of albums

Family albums are living documents that pass down generations. Craft's album moved through four generations of female keepers. The album first passed to Emeline, who then gave it to her daughter (Craft's granddaughter) Julia Ellen Craft DeCosta. The album was later gifted to Craft's great-granddaughters and DeCosta's daughters: Julia Ellen Craft Davis and her sister Vicki, who donated it to the Avery Research Center's public archive.[45]

Fig. 19 Unknown, *Untitled (Arabella Chapman, John R. Chapman, and John T. Chapman)*, ca. 1870s–1880s. Tintype, from the Arabella Chapman albums. Courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

Each generation left its mark on Craft's album while maintaining the book's focus on preserving family integrity and respectability. For example, "Aunt Sophie McDowel (sic)" is written along the bottom of the photograph of the woman with two bows (fig. 9). Below it, in different handwriting, is the additional descriptor: "Sister of Emeline Kinloch Craft, Charleston, SC," suggesting that descendants felt the need to record the identity and family relations of sitters, perhaps for future generations.[46]

Chapman's album similarly shows evidence of multi-generational engagement. Underneath the group photograph of Chapman with her father and brother is the handwritten note "Mother, grandpa, John" (fig. 19). An inscription below a photograph of Chapman and her mother states "Ma and Grandma" (fig 20). These notations suggest that Chapman passed her albums down to her daughter Alfarata Rebunia Miller

(as Claribel, Chapman's other daughter, had died at age five), who likely annotated the photographs. Many notations in similar handwriting occur underneath photos throughout the album. At times, an initial entry has been crossed out and a correction written below, as in an altered caption to Sarah Smith's photograph (fig. 13), suggesting that more than one keeper may have annotated the album over time; perhaps her son Aubin Carrol Miller (1895–1952) also contributed notations to the collection in later years. Evincing a style that became prominent in albums of the 1870s, Chapman's albums also include indexes at the front where she, her daughter, or a later album keeper recorded a list of names of the individuals represented. These elaborate notations suggest that Arabella and her descendants felt the call to record the memory of family and friends' identities for posterity.

The notes added to the portraits in Craft's and Chapman's albums indicate that these images not only carried meanings for the albums' original creators, but also for future generations of women in their families. The albums may have allowed later generations to, in a sense, carry on the social rituals of album spectatorship with their deceased relatives. Departed relatives could not be physically present, but their memories were preserved via the selected photographs marked on the albums' pages. By flipping through the pages and reading notes, a descendant could almost imagine sitting in the parlor close to one's mother or

Fig. 20 Unknown, *Untitled (Arabella Chapman and Harriet Alfarata)*, ca. 1870s–1880s. Tintype, from the Arabella Chapman albums. Courtesy William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan, Ann Arbor, MI.

grandmother and carrying on a conversation about one's roots. For later generations of women still facing pervasive negative stereotypes of Black femininity in the broader culture, the albums may have offered an optics of domestic respectability.

Through these albums, we glimpse how African American mothers created photographic albums that operated in resistance to mainstream representations. By demonstrating their bonds with friends while also documenting the lives of their children and family before passing their albums down to descendants, nineteenth-century African American middle-class mothers like Craft and Chapman re-envisioned degrading period notions about Black motherhood. These documents remind us that historical resistance is often found in the most intimate of spaces – in family albums and notes of connection and support. Across images and notations, women present themselves, their mothers, and other family members and friends as fostering and maintaining visions of respectability that reject society's stereotypes. The albums highlight these women's roles in cultivating and preserving family and community identity, support, and intergenerational memories – elements they saw as vital to their success and to the future of their race.

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2 Claudia Tate, *Domestic Allegories of Political Desire: The Black Heroine's Text at the Turn of the Century* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1992); Evelyn Brooks Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent: The Women's Movement in the Black Baptist Church: 1880–1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1993); Erica Armstrong Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom: African American Women and Emancipation in the Antebellum City*

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3 Mary Trent, "'An Album is a Garden Spot': Visualizing Freedom in the Family Photographs of the Formerly-Enslaved Ellen Craft," *American Art* vol. 37, no. 1 (Spring 2023): 58–81.

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5 Mary Trent, "The Album's Diverse Narratives," in *Diverse Voices in Photographic Albums: "These Are Our Stories,"* eds. Mary Trent and Kris Belden-Adams (London: Routledge, 2024), 3–23.

6 Martha Langford, *Suspended Conversations: The Afterlife of Memory in Photographic Albums* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2001), 122–157.

7 Patrizia Di Bello, *Women's Albums and Photography in Victorian England* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2007), 139–160.

8 *Diverse Voices in Photographic Albums: "These Are Our Stories"*; Emilie Boone, "A Photo Album's Redrawn Color Line: On Black Freedom in Japan, 1947-1949," *Trans Asia Photography Journal* vol. 13, no. 2 (November 2023), https://doi.org/10.1215/21582025-10924828; Cheryl Finley, "No More Auction Block for Me!," in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, eds. Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012), 329–348; *Pictures with Purpose: Early Photographs from the National Museum of African American History and Culture*, eds. Laura Coyle and Michèle Gates Moresi (London: Giles, 2019).

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14 Willis, *Picturing Us*, 15–17.

15 Tate, *Domestic Allegories*, 59; Higginbotham, *Righteous Discontent*; Dunbar, *A Fragile Freedom*.

16 Jasmine Nichole Cobb, *Picture Freedom: Remaking Black Visuality in the Early Nineteenth Century* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 109.

17 Craft's father was an enslaver who separated her from her enslaved mother (whom he kept in bondage) when she was eleven years old. Likewise, William's parents and siblings were sold to different buyers. William and Ellen Craft, *Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom; or, The Escape of William and Ellen Craft from Slavery* (London: William Tweedie, 1860).

18 R. J. M. Blackett, "Fugitive Slaves in Britain: The Odyssey of William and Ellen Craft," *Journal of American Studies* vol. 12, no. 1 (April 1978): 56–61; Gay Gibson Cima, *Performing Anti-Slavery: Activist Women on Antebellum Stages* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014), 229–230.

19 Photo album, ca. 1850s, Craft and Crum Families Papers, Avery Research Center, College of Charleston, Charleston, SC. Digitized scans are available at the Lowcountry Digital Library, lcdl.library.cofc.edu/lcdl/catalog/lcdl:39896.

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26 Rooks, *Ladies' Pages*, 9–10.

27 Rooks, 42.

28 *To Make Their Own Way in the World: The Enduring Legacy of the Zealy Daguerreotypes*, eds. Ilisa Barbash, Molly Rogers, and Deborah Willis (Cambridge, MA: Peabody Museum Press and Aperture, 2020).

29 Matthew Fox-Amato, *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 67–102.

30 Trent, 65, 73–74. My 2023 essay was the first to identify Craft as the woman in this photograph.

31 Trent, 65–66.

32 Samantha Hill, "Curating Kinship: Arabella Chapman Albums. Circa 1850–1900," in *Framing Identity: Representations of Empowerment and Resilience within the Black Experience*, online exh., William L. Clements Library, University of Michigan (accessed February 5, 2025), https://clements.umich.edu/.

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35 Craft's *carte-de-visite* of Lincoln includes a printed image with his signature on the bottom. The back of the card indicates that it was produced by G. W. Bacon and Company, an American printer who opened a shop in London in 1870. Both Craft's and Chapman's images are copies based on an original photograph taken by Anthony Berger on February 9, 1864, which is sometimes attributed to Matthew Brady. Both albums include a seated photograph of Frederick Douglass taken in 1864 by B. F. Smith and Sons.

36 Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities* (London: Verso, 1983).

37 Elizabeth Siegel, *Galleries of Friendship and Fame: A History of Nineteenth-Century American Photograph Albums* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 142–155.

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40 The 1870 Albany census lists Sarah and Joseph as living with Mary J. Miller (1838–1927) and Mary's three children, Clarence, Rubinia, and Grace. Mary may have been Sarah's daughter from a first marriage and was likely widowed. In the 1880 census, Mary appears to have later remarried William H. Yopp and taken his surname. Arabella's albums include a photograph of Sanford Yopp, Mary's son and Clarence's half-brother, who lived with Mary into adulthood according to the 1910 Albany census. Mary Jane Smith Yopp is buried in the Albany Rural Cemetery, where she shares a headstone with Joseph Aubin Smith and Sarah Sanford Smith. Situated nearby are her children, including Clarence, and the Chapmans. Note that Clarence and Arabella gave one of their daughters the middle name of Clarence's sister Rubinia, who had died her in teens, though they altered its spelling: Alfarata Rebunia Miller (b. 1889).

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