FOUR

PICTURING RACIAL PAIN

We must remember, first of all, that the black body seldom speaks for itself.

—Paul Gilroy, Between Camps

On December 3, 1861, Frederick Douglass delivered a lecture entitled “Pictures and Progress,” discussing the popular craze for daguerreotypes and photographic portraits. While his contemporaries Walt Whitman and Ralph Waldo Emerson had enthusiastically celebrated the new medium’s “egalitarian spirit” (Meehan 2008, 15), Douglass remained ambivalent about the political uses of photographic representation. He deemed pictures unlikely to exert decisive political force, because their “faithful rendering” failed to inspire emotion and compassion: “The dead fact is nothing without the living impression. . . . This is truth, but truth disrobed of its sublimity and glory. A kind of frozen truth, destitute of motion itself—it is incapable of producing emotion in others” (Meehan 2008, 462; my italics). For Douglass, pictures were a “cold” form of representation and necessarily failed as instruments of compassionate politics. Remaining thus ambivalent about photography’s capacity to instill American sentiments in favor of the abolitionist cause—and thus the true relation of “pictures and progress”—Douglass closed his lecture by switching to the prominent topic of 1861, and delivered a fervent call for the military participation of African Americans.

For the black abolitionist, photography may have offered nominal recognition within the public sphere, but in order to achieve the necessary “emotional recognition”—i.e., to possess a body that can be compassionately felt with—for Douglass only the corporeal sacrifice in the war against slavery sufficed. Photographic representation seemed to merely obscure the sustained denial of full self-possession for black Americans, who might have circulated as visual tokens but were excluded from the military struggle over
their enslavement. It is in this sense that Douglass criticized the “decidedly conservative” (455) nature of pictures: photography literally conserves its subject, interrupts change and movement. It fixes a person in a moment of frozen truth, which for Douglass meant the not fully humanized “runaway slave.” Photography’s stillness, in this view, signified the very opposite of what the prominent abolitionist fought for—the social, political, legal, and material transformation of slaves from mercantile objects into fully autonomous, feeling, and self-possessed members of the American body.

Douglass’s attack on the stillness of photography exposes an important problem of abolitionist discourse before the war: the often patronizing framings to black testimony that white abolitionists employed. Within the conventions of the slave narrative genre, the African American perspective was generally reduced to that of the “bodily witness” (DeLombard 2007, 5) to slavery, while white patrons provided the moral and political framework to black autobiographical texts. Authors were told to limit their testimony to plain enumeration of bodily experiences, a catalogue of violations to be interpreted by white editors and readers: “Give us the facts. . . . We will take care of the philosophy,” Douglass was told (quoted in Westerbeck 1998, 158). The editorial practices of white abolitionists—framing first-person narrations of former slaves with introductions, prefaces, and letters of recommendation—oftentimes separated the positions of bodily experience and political commentary along the color line. William Lloyd Garrison’s preface to Douglass’s Narrative, for example, transitions from a display of compassion to one of patriotism, and from soberly stating the averageness of Douglass’s experience to sentimental exclamation marks:

He who can peruse [the narrative] without a tearful eye, a heaving breast, an afflicted spirit—without being filled with an unutterable abhorrence of slavery and all its abettors . . . without trembling for the fate of his country . . . must have a flinty heart, and be qualified to act the part of trafficker “in slaves and the souls of men.” . . . The experience of Frederick Douglass, as a slave, was not a peculiar one . . . his case may be regarded as a very fair specimen of the treatment of slaves in Maryland . . . many have suffered incomparably more, while very few on the plantations have suffered less, than himself. Yet how deplorable was his situation! what terrible chastisements were inflicted upon his person! (Douglass 2001, 6–7)

While black subjects thus passively illustrated Southern abhorrence and Northern patriotism, the privilege of compassionate feelings, reflection, and political action on behalf of this spectacle of pain was reserved for a
white readership. This racial division of intellectual labor within abolitionist discourse also related to biologizing notions of racial difference, and their meanings for the politics of antislavery discourse. Harriet Beecher Stowe, in *Key to Uncle Tom's Cabin* (1853), commented on the different makeup of the “negro’s” nervous system and the resulting differences in emotionality in order to legitimize white framing practices for black narrations. She writes:

> They are possessed of a nervous organization peculiarly susceptible and impressible . . . they give vent to their emotions with the utmost vivacity of expression, and their whole bodily system sympathizes with the movement of their minds. . . . Like Oriental nations, they incline much to outward expression, violent gesticulations, and agitating movements of the body. . . . They will laugh, weep, and embrace each other convulsively, and sometimes become entirely paralyzed and cataleptic. (Stowe 2001[1853], 27)

Stowe’s evocation of black “vivacity of expression” seeks to establish African American emotions not as equal to the political virtue of white compassionate sensitivity. Rather, the black body seems caught between the corporeal extremes of affective-sympathetic convulsion and catalepsy or loss of sensation altogether. The oversaturated corporeality associated with blackness justifies a general delegitimization of slave testimony, and Stowe, unsurprisingly, proposes that only the “colder and more correct white race” (quoted in Spillers 2003, 177) is able to control and manage the intensely corporeal vivacity of expression of black subjects. African American authors were framed primarily as bodies of evidence even when making the transition to oratory at political rallies. As Douglass noted during his career as a public speaker, white abolitionists introduced him as “graduate from the peculiar institution . . . with the diploma written on my back” (quoted in Castronovo 1999, 43). And in 1896, he reflected on the demand to perform as a corporeal witness of slavery at abolitionist conventions: “I was called upon to expose even my stripes, and with many misgivings obeyed the summons and tried thus to do my whole duty” (quoted in Mailloux 2002, 102).

Contemporaneous to these evidential logistics deployed around the black body in slave narratives, a similar rhetoric of bodily evidence organized the naturalizing and objectifying discourses of racial science. The previous chapters already touched on physiometry, craniology, and comparative anatomy, disciplines that constructed bodily shapes as evidence of evolutionary progress and ontological differences between races. The new medium of photography, regarded as the medium of both veracity and objective truth, supplemented perfectly the descriptive procedures of racial science and its rhetoric of objective measurement, which related external differences
in bodies to biological inferiority. As Mandy Reid writes: “[P]hotography functioned as an important epistemological tool for scientists because it ostensibly recorded the ‘truth’ of its subjects” (2006, 285). One of the foremost racial scientists of the antebellum era, the Swiss-born ethnologist and zoologist Louis Agassiz, was the first to supplement the scientific rhetoric with the photographic medium, more than a decade before opponents of slavery employed the medium for abolitionist purposes. Already in 1850, Agassiz commissioned the photographic capture of seven different black slaves from a plantation in Columbia, a task that was executed by local photographer J. T. Zealy. The resulting fifteen so-called slave daguerreotypes depict the individuals as examples of “African types,” because Agassiz categorized them by their alleged African origins—“Foulah,” “Congo,” “Gullah,” etc. As Brian Wallis writes in his thorough discussion of Agassiz’s visual archive, the photographs adhere to a physiognomic and phrenological approach: they “attempt to record body shape, proportions, and posture,” and “emphasize the character and shape of the head” (Wallis 1995, 45–46). Reiterating the theories of Samuel Morton’s monumental studies in phrenology, Crania Americana (1839) and Crania Aegyptiana (1844), Agassiz’s images are intended to visually demonstrate the physiometry of “African types” as evidence for their inferior position on the evolutionary scale.

Importantly, Agassiz’s images oscillate between a typologizing and individualizing rhetoric that is similar to Garrison’s typifying introduction of Frederick Douglass’s experience: while on the one hand depicting a single, specified, and named person, they simultaneously exhibit that person primarily as a typical, impersonal, and exposed body that exemplifies a racial group. What Brian Wallis calls the typological gaze, the generalizing function of the typological portrait, is characteristic to the evidential logistics of both racial science (racial type) and abolitionist discourse (racial fate). Both gazes on the black body reduce the black subject to a silenced catalogue of bodily features as evidence, be it scars or skull shapes:

The type is clearly situated within a system [of knowledge] that denies its subject even as it establishes overt relations between its mute subjects. The emphasis on the body occurs at the expense of speech; the subject is already positioned, known, owned, represented, spoken for, or constructed as silent; in short, it is ignored. In other words, the typological photograph is a form of representational colonialism. (1995, 54)

The typological rhetoric articulated in discourses of both racial science and abolitionist writing, though also functioning as photographic portraits or personal narratives, in this view silences the represented subjects by making
their bodies speak by themselves through “visible taxonomies” (Wiegman 1995, 33).

The typological gaze and the evidential body are concepts that shape the readings of abolitionist photography this chapter carries out. I interpret abolitionist photographs of the Civil War in light of the interlaced representational practices established by racial science and antebellum abolitionism. The 1863 publication of the photograph commonly known as The Scourged Back, depicting the extensively scarred back of an African American male, is the epitome of the visual discourse that during the Civil War tried to achieve what Frederick Douglass had deemed impossible: to instill compassion and affective recognition for slaves via photographic representation—to link “pictures” and (democratic/racial) “progress.” This discourse, which I call photographic abolitionism, emerged during the height of the Civil War and presented a renewed propagandistic effort by abolitionists that answered to crucial social events: in 1863 the first African American regiment was organized to controversial reaction within the Union; the New York Draft Riots reflected both the racial tensions and the increasing “compassion fatigue” among Northerners. In reaction, abolitionists of the North widely distributed photographic prints—in the popular format of “cartes de visite”—as a means of visual propaganda to turn public opinion in their favor. These pictures, depicting black and white injured bodies, sought to both visualize the “dehumanizing pain” of slavery and the “heroic pain” of fighting it.

Through a discussion of this often neglected photographic archive of abolitionism, my chapter argues that the visual transformation or “humanization” of slaves crucially revolves around a discursive evocation and distribution of pain among different bodies, and along racial lines. Photographic abolitionism—The Scourged Back constituting the crucial center of this discourse—negotiates the black body’s ability to suffer (from slavery, for liberation), and the white body’s ability for compassion (to feel and suffer with/for the slave). In this visual discourse, racialized bodies are constructed, compared, and negotiated in their capacity to feel pain, suffer, and compassionately feel with other bodies. The archive of photographs enacts a comparative dolorology that attaches various national and political meanings to different bodies in pain, and effectively governs how the injury, suffering, and trauma in racialized bodies counts toward the remaking and emancipation of America.

The dominant aim of these photographs is the iconographical production of the slave body as “human” and therefore illegitimately objectified into “mercantile object.” They negotiate the humanization of the black body by visually capturing it in a state of hurt, by representing it as a vulnerable body suffering from slavery and in want of liberation, humanity, relief from pain. Photographic abolitionism seizes the black body on the threshold between
captivity and liberation, and invests it with a capacity for pain that can be compassionately recognized and inserted into the visual discourse of national sentimentality, where it competes with other bodies for national significance. In this process—the photographic humanization of commodified and abject slaves—Northern abolitionist photography therefore not only represents, but also constructs and compares different racialized and gendered bodies and their claims to a nationally significant suffering.

Photographic abolitionism thus constitutes—like the genre of the slave narrative—an instance of sentimentalist uses of the black body in America. In Karen Sánchez-Eppler’s words, the sentimentalist rhetoric in abolitionism is crucially informed by a double logic: while trying to represent the abject experiences and violations of slaves as “humans,” they also vitally construct and demarcate the possible sites of black subjectivity: “[Abolitionism] seeks to speak the body, but . . . in so representing the body . . . exploit and limit it” (1997, 8). In the circumscription of black bodies, articulated through notions of pain and trauma, abolitionism produces corporeal scripts that crucially shape racial discourse for post-slavery America. The “humanization” of the slave body not only articulates the social and political value of the black body suffering from slavery, but also perpetrates naturalizing, pathologizing, and biological meanings of racial difference. Whereas Sánchez-Eppler and others have analyzed the narrative formulas and containments of black suffering, embodiment, and subjectivity exhibited in abolitionist literature, this chapter relates this observation to the photographic archive of abolitionism.

The issues at stake are thus: What sentimental and biopolitical notions of race and gender are articulated and inscribed through the photographic depiction of the pain of slavery, and what bodies and possibilities of embodiment are constructed? What are the discursive and corporeal effects of visual states of exception, presented in shocking photographs of slave experience such as The Scourged Back? How do these alignments of racial bodies and pain matter to and prescribe the post-slavery racial order of the nation? What forms of black suffering and thus black embodiment are visually incorporated into the logistics of an American dolorology that organizes different subjects’ access to pain?

The arguments of this chapter are unfolded in a series of readings, first in the visual circumscriptions of black and white pain, evidenced in the photograph The Scourged Back, its uncanny doppelgänger, and pictorial representations of white Union soldiers. These racializing evocations of pain—situated in the context of both slavery and abolition—constitute a crucial instance of comparative dolorology that constructs and regulates the meanings of bodies in pain, and, importantly, the raciality of national trauma. The photographic representations of pain in white and black male bodies are confronted with representations of black female suffering in visual
disadvantage. Contrary to the fetishization of scarred black male bodies and the nationally significant amputations of white soldiers, these photographs simultaneously address and silence slavery’s regime of sexual violence and circumscribe black female pain in the terms of racial reproduction. The images in various ways “disarticulate” (Michaelis 2010) the issue of miscegenation and sexual exploitation of female slaves as mothers. This pathologizing view on black reproduction ties in with a further series of images that explicitly try to visualize miscegenation as a post-slavery problem. In the popular series of photographs representing “redeemed slave children,” distributed in 1863 and 1864, abolitionist photography envisions the precarious biopolitical “future” of liberated racialized subjects by representing almost exclusively “visually white” children. These children function as “living mementos” of miscegenation and enable renegotiation of racial demarcations for segregated, post-emancipation America. These “miscegenation portraits” not only articulate a negation of the black family, but also negotiate the biopolitical meanings of miscegenation and emancipation and the various racial populations they produced.

HISTORIES OF THE BACK

[1] In the context of the plantation, the humanity of the slave appears as the perfect figure of a shadow.

—Achille Mbembe, *Necropolitics*

The picture *The Scourged Back*, in its singularity and iconicity, is commonly associated with the capability of bringing the trauma of slavery into view. It is reprinted in many present-day historical works on and representations of slavery (e.g., Blight 2004) and America (e.g., Faragher et al. 1995). While the image is often used to illustrate the brutality of white American enslavement practices, it has become iconic also through its appropriations by African American culture: it is, for example, featured prominently in the anthology of AfroAmerica, *The Black Book* (Harris et al. 1974); it has inspired the “chokecherry tree” that furrows Sethe’s back in Toni Morrison’s novel *Beloved* (1987) and Jonathan Demme’s filmic adaptation. Rap musician NAS has reworked the motive on the cover of his 2008 unnamed album.

The photograph (Fig. 4.1) shows the exposed back of an African American man. Head turned sideways so that he is in profile, the man shows the pattern of scars covering a large portion of his back to the camera. With calm composure, he has angled his left arm to display the extensive scars. He seems wrapped in a thick blanket. The photographic print of
1863 became one of the central pieces in antislavery propaganda and was circulated by the thousands as a carte de visite during the Civil War. Its reproduction featured prominently in a *Harper’s Weekly* article published on Independence Day 1864, which denounced the practices of Southern slaveholders and presented the photographed man as Gordon, a fugitive slave picked up by the Union army stationed at Baton Rouge, Louisiana, which he promptly joined. Today a copy of the carte is kept at the Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, and the photograph is most frequently cited as *The Scourged Back* (inscription of the carte), or Gordon, the name many assume for the person depicted.

But there is a second picture (Fig. 4.2), uncannily similar to *The Scourged Back*, which has been largely neglected by historical scholarship. Judging from the clothing, the only slightly differing posture of the left arm, and the body’s similar positioning on the chair toward the camera, this image
probably depicts the same man. In all likelihood taken in the same sitting, the photograph seems somehow flawed, as the person’s head is caught in motion which renders his facial features not clearly distinguishable. The image lacks the portrait-like characteristics found in *The Scourged Back*, but its main intent is also to display the extensive scars on the back of the man. The photograph, kept in the National Archives at College Park, is also in carte de visite format and dated 1863. The archive’s database has it registered under the following name, which is excerpted from the carte’s verso: “Overseer Artayou Carrier whipped me. I was two months in bed sore from the whipping. My master come after I was whipped; he discharged the overseer. The very words of poor Peter, taken as he sat for his picture. Baton Rouge, Louisiana, 04/02/1863.”16

Gordon and Peter—two images with contradicting histories, and two pictures depicting the same subject. To express the extreme instability of the

Figure 4.2. Peter (for full title see text). Carte de visite (1863). Source: National Archives at College Park, “Photographic Prints in John Taylor Album, compiled ca. 1861–1865” (165-JT-230).
term subject in this context will be the goal of my reading. Both pictures stage—assuming the “identity” of the person shown in them—a fundamental misnaming of their subject. Understood within abolitionist visual discourse, they enact a discursive desire to visualize the pain and injury that enslavement does to the racialized body. At the same time, their ascribed histories destabilize the subject attached to that body. My reflection on the discursive act of “seeing black pain” in abolitionism will therefore critically engage with the double vision these two pictures and their paratexts enforce. By double vision I mean not only the constitutive misnamings of subjects (gordon or peter), but also the simultaneous reiterations of racialized and gendered subjectivity that “humanization” enacts. The visual registry of pain in abolitionism not only produces human subjects by articulating their visible (qua bodily) vulnerability, it also intersects with and reiterates discourses that reify specific notions of race and gender. gordon and peter in this sense denote different “reflexes of iconography” (Spillers 2003, 206), different discursive circumscriptions that seek to rhetorically contain and control the violated bodies in the photographs in order to conjure specific notions of a black subjectivity that is both caught within and liberated from slavery. They thus conceal the experience of slavery in its explicit representation, hiding it in plain view. Before I critically extend on the conflicting narrations attached to these images and their repercussions, I want to first measure out some of the distance between text and image, textual legibility and bodily facticity, political interpretation and what can be described as the rhetorics of “shock” at work in the image—a trope that recurs in many receptions of the image(s).

Part of The Scourged Back’s iconicity can be accounted to the picture’s ostentatious plainness, its uncompromising display of shocking violation: A black man displays the scars of a severe whipping, what more can be said about the image? Obviously nothing, if one follows historian Louis Masur’s reception of the photograph: “It moves us . . . viscerally” (1998, 1415). Masur’s evocation of a bodily, even visceral reaction to the picture suggests three meanings: (1) “Being moved viscerally” by the image means to affectively retrace its subject, the physical marks of brutal, corporeal punishment; it means a bodily reaction to a figuration of the hurt body. (2) “Being moved viscerally” means further to be transported to the scene of the photograph and to confront the presence and facticity of the subject it displays. And (3), “Being moved viscerally” means also to fall out of speaking, lose one’s means of description, and to fully realize the corporeal meaning implied in the act of seeing this image. The photograph thus presents what Roland Barthes in his essay The Photographic Message (1961) describes as a “traumatic image”:

Strictly traumatic photographs are rare, the trauma is entirely dependent on the certainty that the scene has really occurred: the
photographer had to be there . . . the shock image is by structure non-signifying: no value, no knowledge, at the limit no verbal categorization can have any hold over the process instituting its signification. We might imagine a law: the more direct the trauma, the more difficult the connotation. (1985, 19)

The traumatic picture ruptures language and signification; it leaves no room for “reading” it. Barthes argues for a kind of photographic state of exception, a suspension of interpretation the shock photograph enacts. Like pain itself, the shocking image interrupts the production of meaning. Barthes concludes that “the traumatic photograph is the one about which there is nothing to say” (19).\(^\text{17}\) Visualizing that which cannot be spoken—the pain of slavery—the picture of the body abused in enslavement replaces descriptions, accounts, enumerations—in short, the discourse—about slavery. For a critic contemporaneous to the photograph’s publication in 1863, this force of the visual to displace language, narration, and interpretation was also the primary appeal of the image: “This Card Photograph should be multiplied by the 100,000, and scattered over the States. It tells the story in a way that even Mrs. Stowe cannot approach, because it tells the story to the eye” (quoted in Collins 1985a, 44).\(^\text{18}\)

What is common in Masur’s and the nineteenth-century critic’s reactions to the traumatic image, is an articulation of unreadability, or even refusal to read, contextualize, and interpret The Scourged Back. Its proper mode of reception is presented as a “feeling with” the picture and the person it portrays, to enact a corporeal transmission between photographed hurt and the shock of viewing that evades interpretation. Laura Wexler has brilliantly called attention to this critical evasion of photography’s rhetoricity with her notion of photographic anekphrasis. Anekphrasis, in contrast to the classical concept of ekphrasis,\(^\text{19}\) is the “active and selective refusal to read photography—its graphic labor, its social spaces—[a] neglect of critical attention to the raced, classed, and gendered productions of the photographic image” (1997, 163). The traumatic image, or rather the suspension of interpretation performed by its recipients, is one of the rhetorical gestures articulating pain and trauma as the unspeakable, as a discursive state of exception. This gesture disarticulates the racial and gendered stratifications enacted by photography, and their recovery is the objective of my reading.

The focus of my interpretation is guided by the relation between pain, race, and the construction of the nation. In Lauren Berlant’s definition of sentimental culture, being recognized as a part of an affective community is conducted through the display of pain as a “true feeling”: the affective acknowledgment of that pain enables the “culturally privileged to humanize those subjects who have been excluded from the . . . social aspects
of citizenship” (2008, 35). I take the photographs as a cornerstone and highly effective extension of the iconographic measures taken by Northern abolitionism in order to direct America’s affective attention to the pain of slaves. The overarching question of my close readings of Gordon and Peter asks what the images—in their “revelation” and “display” of the hurt black body—tell about the transformation of the black body from “human-cum-thing” (Judy 1994) to the African American subject as citizen. In reaction to Debra King’s assessment that the “pained black body becomes a representational sign for the democratizing process of U.S. culture itself” (2008, 8), I discuss the images in relation to the photographic representation of white soldiers’ bodies in pain. This contextualization of Gordon and Peter will enable the discussion of the different and differential work of pain and its function as a relay to distribute the meanings of “race” and “nation.”

**GORDON**

To be public in the West [is] to have iconicity.

—Michael Warner, *The Mass Public and the Mass Subject*

Art historian Kathleen Collins claims that *The Scourged Back* is the printed version of an original photograph that a certain Dr. Towle sent to his superiors from Baton Rouge, Louisiana, on April 16, 1863. She quotes the army surgeon’s enclosed letter, which later, Collins claims, served as a reverse inscription to the distributed carte:

I enclose a picture taken by an artist here, from life, of a Negro’s back, exhibiting the scars from an old whipping. Few sensation writers ever depicted worse punishments than this man must have received, though nothing in his appearance indicates any unusual viciousness but on the contrary, he seems intelligent and well-behaved. (1985a, 44)

Towle’s photograph was then probably communicated to the photography studio of McPherson & Oliver in Boston, and soon issued as a photographic print under the heading *The Scourged Back*, which received circulation even to European circles. This background sheds some plausible light on the situation and intent the picture was taken in, namely, by a medical professional who encountered the photographed man in Baton Rouge. While the military context is plausible, the photograph’s further usage in a Harper’s Weekly article extends this association considerably: on the Fourth of July, 1864, the magazine printed an etching made after the picture, flanked by two more pictures and a text titled “A Typical Negro”
The paratext narrates the story of the heroic escape of the slave Gordon, who had run away from “his master in Mississippi” and was picked up by Unionists at the frontlines of Baton Rouge (see Collins 1985a; Wood 2000, 267). The three etchings semantically construct a rise from fugitive to victim to soldier. Depicting a black person sitting in rags, the bared back as centerpiece, and an ostensibly “whiter” man wearing a Northern uniform, the pictures are captioned: “Gordon as he entered our lines,” “Gordon under Medical Inspection,” “Gordon in his uniform as a U.S. Soldier.” The person’s history as a fugitive slave, having barely escaped a unnamed cruel master and upon rescue promptly enlisting as a soldier, sticks closely to sentimental conventions of the written slave narrative: the plot pits bloodhounds and brutal slave hunters against the resourceful slave, who rubs his “skin with onions to throw off the dogs.” Gordon’s scars are circumscribed with associations of Christian martyrdom, originating from Stowe’s benevolently suffering Uncle Tom. The picture of the scarred back in this view performs a sort of Christian Ecce Homo, displaying the wounds of torture to an unbelieving audience.

Figure 4.3. A Typical Negro. Article and illustration. Harper’s Weekly, 4th of July 1864. Source: Library of Congress, Photographs and Prints Division (LC-USZ62-98515)
The paratextual framing performs a humanization of the slave not primarily by a depiction of suffering from enslavement by whites, but through a redeeming narration of escape and (white) rescue. As Marcus Wood interprets the three reproductions in Harper’s Weekly, the narration effectively contains the trauma of slavery within a heroic resurrection scenario:

Gordon’s experience in slavery can be defined only in relation to his present status as a pristinely uniformed private in the United States army. Before he enters the army, and after he has entered it, Gordon’s back is hidden by clothing. It is, in fact, only via the process of medical inspection that he may enter the military, and this in turn enables the documentation of his scarring and public display, through reproduction of the troops. The photograph provides a sort of forensic Lazarus. . . . The medical unit of the Union army has legitimated the record of Gordon’s suffering, and resurrected him as a soldier. (2000, 268f)

The image’s shock value is thus simultaneously exploited by and controlled within a compassionate narrative of relief and reinstatement of the nation, as the formerly abused black male victim is rescued and humanized through Northern white military and medical authority.

The paratextual overlay of the image transforms also the photographed subject. The (mis)identification as Gordon by the article aligns with the clear facial profile in the image, resulting in a picture that oscillates between portraiture (of a “subject” with a “history”) and medical examination of a specific case. Gordon emerges as an identifiable person, a singular fate. His stoic expression appears as an index of masculine, pain-defying bravery, even a pride of “displaying” the wounds he has endured and overcome. Their display seems, against the background of the story, to become a politically autonomous act, a self-conscious exhibition of endurance, which in the given context makes Gordon fit for military service. The final transformation in the triptych, which dooms the uniform of the Union soldier, removes Gordon further from both wound and blackness—the figure stands proud, invulnerable and erect, and is depicted as white. In both illustration and textual narration, Gordon’s subjectivity is achieved through the body’s proximity to trauma and pain, from which it is perpetually distanced and removed. In Isabell Lorey’s terms, the article and etching “immunize” (2007) abolitionist discourse: while they do acknowledge the corporeal lacerations of slavery, they simultaneously neutralize the disruptive force of the wound through a series of stabilizations (stoicism, bravery), narrative closures (the army), and reinscriptions (whitewashing of Gordon), which also serve to convince white audiences of the “well-behaved” civility of black soldiers.
In another maneuver the article metonymically depersonalizes Gordon by describing him as “A Typical Negro,” reminiscent of William Garrison’s appellation of Frederick Douglass as a “fair specimen” of the enslaved. The metonymy that substitutes all African Americans with a “typical” and male example renders the man’s bodily state both monumental and average: the scars on the male body stand in for the bodily suffering of the “whole race,” and are simultaneously moderated by this metonymy. The inscription of “A Typical Negro” in this view reduces the black experience of slavery to the traces of whipping on a black male body: the rhetoric of the scar simplifies the systematic forms of abuse, physical and sexual exploitation, and dehumanizing practices of white supremacy to a form of physical punishment.

Gordon’s calm posture, moreover, associates racial stereotypes about the insensitivity of African Americans and their relative indifference to violent oppression, a common argument for proslavery advocates. This double connotation effectively situates the pain of slavery in bodies alone, as Wood explains: “The move from bodily wound to mental wound is not admitted” (2000, 232): suffering from slavery, in this view, is connected only to corporeal pain, which reattaches blackness to (male) bodiliness and passive forbearance. Especially this last point—already visible in Towle’s initial description of the man as not displaying “any unusual viciousness but . . . intelligent and wellbehaved”—mollified Northern white audiences in their fear of black rage and insurgency. While the fear of retaliation from slaves was prominent in white sensibilities at least since the publication of The Narrative of Nat Turner (1838), the anxiety of blacks joining the “brother war” and thus gaining access to weapons (to be used against white people) provided a topical background for the triptych, which erases the exposed trauma by hiding the scars under military uniformity.

The redemption narrative constructed by the Harper’s Weekly article subsumes the pain of slavery in different ways: Gordon’s pain is a personal transition (overcome by enlisting), which constructs white Northern abolitionism and the military cause as the humanization agency for abused slaves: entering as ragged, indifferent victims, they emerge as proud (and whiter) patriots. Within this national sentimental script, Gordon’s scars are further framed as simply the “Scourged Back” of “A Typical Negro.” This generalizes and eternalizes racial trauma, while simultaneously containing it through the stoic posture of the male hurt body. Since the article and triptych were published on Independence Day, the double history embedding Gordon’s scars participates in both national and racial discourse: a history of national trauma, which replaces the scars of slavery with the stripes of the army (and blackness with whiteness); and of racial trauma, which seals pain in a generalized and insensitive black male body.
Iconicity comes with no guarantee of affirmative possibilities.

—Sara Blair, *The Photograph’s Last Word*

Working differently from this narrative framing are the paratexts surrounding the image I have earlier introduced as *peter*. The shreds of facticity circumscribing it and its nearly identical mise en scène both suggest that it depicts *the same person* captured in the *Scourged Back*: the image was also probably taken in April 1863, is connected to Baton Rouge, Louisiana, and also references the whipping’s having taken place around Christmas. The plot attached to the picture however suggests a radically different meaning. I quote the entire inscription as it is found on the card’s verso (Fig. 4.4):²⁶

![Figure 4.4. *peter* (verso) (see Figure 4.2)](image-url)
BATON ROUGE, La. April 2, 1863: Ten days from to-day I left the plantation. Overseer ARTAYOU CARRIER whipped me. My master was not present. I don’t remember the whipping. I was two months in bed sore from the whipping, and my senses began to come—I was sort of crazy. I tried to shoot everybody. They said so, I did not know. I don’t remember that. I burned up all my clothes; but I don’t remember that. I never was this way (crazy) before. I don’t know what make me come that way (crazy). My master come after I was whipped: saw me in bed; he discharged the overseer. They told me I attempted to shoot my wife the first one; I did not shoot any one; I did not harm any one. My master’s Capt. JOHN LYON, cotton planter, on Atchafaya, near Washington, La. Whipped two months before Christmas.

The very words of poor PETER, taken as he sat for his picture.

The most notable difference of PETER is that the scarred body of the man, unlike that of GORDON, is given a voice and a narrative position in the first person: PETER is quoted in his “very words,” which in their description of confusion and lack of memory seem personal and affecting, while constituting in other places a concrete, “plain narration.” Though the image itself, the blurred head and less sovereign posture toward the camera, undercuts the portrayal of a distinct person, the inscription gives way to a more personal story than in the case of GORDON.

Three further aspects are notable in PETER’s narration. First, it tells the story of the whipping in differentiating terms, relegating the excessively violent punishment to the named cruel overseer and depicting the slave holder John Lyon as a benevolent caretaker: the whipping triggered an instance of inner-plantation justice and the overseer was punished for his practices. Further, PETER tells of his lack of memory concerning his psychological state and actions, accompanied with enclosed explanations of his state (“crazy”) by the person who recorded the words. The story also leaves open whether PETER was whipped because of the alleged “shootings” or if he acted violently after the torture. Whether the agitating intention of the story was thus to denounce the mental repercussions of the whipping (turning PETER to violent retribution), or to raise empathy for a slave traumatized and running amok and then being punished, remains unclear.

While the “very words” of the personal narration may or may not be white ventriloquism of a slave’s experience, several aspects of the text exhibit regulative strategies aimed primarily at white audiences. The rather tagged-on note, “Whipped two months before Christmas,” as well as the belittling title Poor Peter can be read as textual acts that channel the narration of violence and loss of self into sentimental formulas. Implying a com-
passionate white reader, the text frames the disturbing story by associating slavery with un-Christian practices, and the African American as deplorable, and ultimately passive victim. The explanatory annotations describing the man’s status as “crazy” can also be read as measures taken to simultaneously fortify the image’s display of violence and undermine the speaker’s agency. This effect is certainly amplified by the blurred apparition of the man’s head, which seems to be caught in more or less violent motion or nervous shifting of posture.

With regard to the identity produced by text and image, the outcome is equally as dilemmatic as in Gordon: the figure’s blurriness undermines the seemingly stable identity evoked by the narration, while the man’s repeated characterizations as “crazy” further draw his story into doubt. That Peter had his portrait taken to illustrate and autonomously authenticate his story—the inscription indicates the voluntary act or autonomous decision to “sit for his picture”—is radically undermined by the literally faceless subject and the simultaneity of identity and anonymity it constructs. Like Gordon, who is both singular for his bodily endurance and a typical example for “the race,” Peter relates a personal (and dubious) story of an unidentifiable male subject. Both images, in this view, deliberately collapse contrary meanings into each other: type and person, singular experience and formula, subject and object of the image.

These inner ambiguities of Gordon and Peter, which with all probability show the same man and were taken in the same sitting, and the contradictory status of their respective narrations and namings, are important in understanding the discursive functions of these photographs in abolitionist discourse. Because, unstable as the stories behind the man/men are, both exhibit the same logic of visually evidencing the unspeakable; both, albeit corroborating different stories, allow the politicized audience to imagine the slave’s body to “speak by itself,” and to do so by virtue of its objectively captured wounds. The pictures thus cater to a desire for self-evidentiality, something which WJT Mitchell has termed *ekphrastic hope*—the optimistic notion invested in the visual that the thing or person represented may speak by/for itself, undistorted by the ideological prescriptions of race. In Mitchell’s terms, the “goal of ekphrastic hope might be called the ‘overcoming of otherness’” (1994b, 156), which in this context corresponds to the white humanitarian/abolitionist subject’s desire to precisely feel as the “other”—according to sentimentalism’s basic sympathetic principle that one feels the pain of the other like one’s own. The images rhetorically construct a reciprocity of equal bodies in affective communication (pain/shock/compassion) that seeks to conceal the corporeal hierarchies of race that underwrite the differences between punisher and punished, liberator and liberated, subject and object of (photographic) discourse—of who speaks, who is made to speak, and
who is spoken for. The following section investigates how this rhetoric of affect complicates the memorial and mnemonic function of these images.

PICTURING RACIAL PAIN

Frederick Douglass’s *Narrative* (1845) famously begins with a meditation on the author’s ignorance about his date of birth: “I have no accurate knowledge of my age, never having seen any authentic record containing it. By far the larger part of the slaves know as little about their ages as horses know of theirs, and it is the wish of most masters within my knowledge to keep their slaves thus ignorant. I do not remember to have ever met a slave who could tell his birthday” (2001[1845], 13). Douglass denounces the denial of self-knowledge as one instrument white slaveholders use to dehumanize slaves, who are kept in ignorance about person, origin, and family relations.27 WJT Mitchell has taken Douglass’s statement to a complex reading addressing the question how slavery can be remembered, when “what [Douglass] is really saying (we suppose) is that slavery is a prevention of memory” (1994b, 187). One of Mitchell’s conclusions is that, from a perspective of remembered experience, the narration of slavery is an impossible undertaking. Since the enslaved subject is prohibited from knowledge of self and thus narratable experience, the genre of slave narrative implies a paradoxical narrative act:

The slave narrative is always written by a former slave; there are no slave narratives, only narratives about slavery written from the standpoint of freedom. It is not even quite accurate to say that the slave narratives are “about” slavery; they are really about the movement from slavery to freedom. A narrative which was simply about slavery . . . is conceivable, but unlikely, and neither could find an author to “own” it as autobiography, as a record of an actual life. Actual narratives, like actual lives, always play off slavery against freedom, which is perhaps why pure slave narrative [is] impossible. (1994b, 190)

The representation of American slavery (understood as the white system of practices, institutions, and discourses of dehumanization that turns black persons into things) can in this view only be remembered from a perspective of the liberated subject, as its “other.” Its narration must employ a temporality and a movement that frames enslavement—a condition of permanent violation—as something the narrator/subject is always already relieved and liberated from. Both temporally and spatially, slavery has to be always already left behind in order to be narratable.
In the analysis of Gordon’s and Peter’s paratextual framings, the logic of temporal and spatial separation has been obvious: both men have spatially left behind enslavement, though only Gordon’s escape is narrated as a story. The Harper’s Weekly article further performs a movement from brutalization to medical care and the redeeming integrative forces of the Union army. Gordon in this view has a future, and his story articulates a perpetual movement toward a national future, as he progresses from black abjection toward an American and whitened subjectivity. The narration surrounding Peter however is less temporally secure in that, while the reader is informed about him leaving the plantation, no future is prescribed or envisioned. Peter’s enslavement is presented as past, but the narration is explicit about the instability of this past, as the several references to his loss of memory exhibit. The narration on the back of the image repeatedly quotes his uncertainty about the exact actions and events before or after the whipping: “My master was not present. I don’t remember the whipping. . . . They said so, I did not know. I don’t remember that. I burned up all my clothes; but I don’t remember that.”

The black autonomous subject constructed in the image’s paratext—Peter who sits for his picture, and tells his story in his own “very words”—is a subject marked by a fundamental loss of memory and a past insecure to himself. The whipping as well as the possibly retaliating violence is rendered as an unstable event by the repeatedly declared lack of memory and the many references to his mental state. The “subject” of the photograph is constructed as unable to truly confirm the excessively brutal violation of his body in enslavement. The viewer however, to whom the trace of pain is exhibited, is “viscerally” able to confirm what has happened. The image constructs the experience of slavery as fundamentally lost to Peter, and its verification only available to the white viewer’s compassionate response. In the image’s structure, the memory of slavery remains ungraspable for the black subject. Its trauma denies knowledge of self, of actions, of events—in short, of experience.

What the photographic “subject,” visually testifying to the brutality of enslavement practices, retains, however, is memory situated in the corporeal—the scars on the back. Invisible to the black subject itself, they are ostentatious and readily decipherable through the compassionate gaze of the white viewer. The liberated slave’s memory is thus situated exclusively in the corporeal, where it is walled off as the opposite of politicized or politicizable experience; the black body stores what the black subject cannot iterate. Intelligibility, the connections of subjectivity and body, and the politics of experience are organized through white compassion, the almost tactile gaze of the white viewer: this gaze verifies that the damage done to the commodified body actually has been the pain of an embodied black subject violated by ensl-
PICTURING RACIAL PAIN

layment. The images set up subjectivity and body against each other; they construct enslavement as an experience neither to be articulated, narrated, nor remembered by the black subject. On the other hand, the black body can never forget slavery. The photograph and its white audiences remember “viscerally” that fundamental vulnerability, which the black subject cannot recall and the black body cannot deny, behind his back.28

Abolitionism’s compassionate maneuver of recognizing the black body as a human body that has been in pain resonates with Judith Butler’s argument on the discursive prescription implicit in recognition itself: “[V]ulnerability is one precondition for humanization, [and] vulnerability is fundamentally dependent on existing norms of recognition if it is to be attributed to any human subject” (2004b, 43). The rhetoric of humanization, which these pictures subscribe to, is complicit with a thoroughly racialized logic of evidence, memory, and the body; the black body serves as evidence of an injured humanity. Its constitutive vulnerability, however, is only recognized by the white onlooking subject. The white photographer/viewer is both “viscerally moved” by the pain of the other and remains fundamentally invisible and discreet within the image’s setup. The black subject articulated in the image, on the other hand, is removed from the experiences that constitute vulnerability and thus humanity, relying on the white photographer/viewer to confirm, interpret and present29 the experience. The embodied black subject is thus constituted as fundamentally split in two: it is caught between a generalized (“Typical Negro”) and an allegorized (Scourged Back) corporeal vulnerability. gordon and peter are produced as subjects that can neither fully attach themselves to that vulnerability nor detach from its violation.

Furthermore, the black subject is separated from itself temporally, as vulnerability always resides in an “eternally” past corporeal memory (the scars), whereas black political subjectivity is articulated as either caught up in a present loss of memory (peter), or disappears in a national futurity that “dresses” the wound in uniform to make it disappear (gordon). The decisively present moment of remembering slavery, which allows the pain of black bodies to enter the political realm and to circulate as evidence, is in this configuration reserved for the exclusively white and upper-class audience of the photographs. Within the logic of evidence and memory, the privilege to in the present moment perceive, verify, remember, interpret, act upon, and ultimately “feel” the pain of slavery rests with white sensibility and its compassionate, yet disembodied gaze. The black subject, on the other hand, is equated with a traumatic embodiment: the body cannot forget what the subject cannot remember.30

Photographic abolitionism, in trying to denounce at once white violence against bodies and (re)capture the black body as suffering,31 therefore
substitutes the systematized corporeal violence governing the racial institution of the plantation for an *epistemological violence*. This violence locks liberated black subjectivity in the paradox of an eternally hurt body connected to the past and an eternally displaced memory. The photography of abolitionism articulates a double movement of inclusion and exclusion, or humanization and simultaneous dehumanization, which Lauren Berlant has pointedly described: “The humanization strategies of sentimentality always traffic in cliché, the reproduction of a person as a thing and thus indulge in the confirmation of the *marginal subject’s embodiment of inhumanity*” (2008, 35; my italics). Abolitionist photography, even as it tries forcefully to articulate pain to argue the humanity of abjected black bodies, remains caught in a racializing and racist logic. According to Laura Wexler, this logic is amplified by the silencing effects these shocking images have both on the viewer and the portrayed/betrayed subject: “[P]hotographic anekphrasis itself is an institutionalized form of racism and sexism” (1997, 163).32

Gordon’s and Peter’s paratexts articulate a temporality of events and movements that allow their stories to be told as “before/after” scenarios, the photos having been taken after their escape from enslavement. At the same time, the images fundamentally undermine this “liberating” and sentimental formula of transformation from thing to man: the photograph freezes the body in a state of hurt, and forces a passive, nonrelational display of pain onto the photographic “subject.” While the display of pain in black bodies as trace of American trauma thus may be aimed at producing African American citizens that have been healed by visual inclusion, it reduces their bodies at the same time to mementos of that trauma, defined always and only through the remembrance of failed democracy that their bodies evidence to white audiences. Black bodies simultaneously reference the failure and self-healing of white American democracy, without entitlement to “heal” themselves. The bodies of Gordon and Peter become “everyday signs of suffering” (King 2008, 5) and work as memorial sites of an always already lost black integrity and humanity. Looking at them means primarily to heal self and nation conceptualized as white: whiteness becomes the only witness of slavery, while black experience and testimony is displaced by *still trauma*. The scar, as these “white looking relations” (Gaines 1986) bring it into view, functions as an ideological figuration that arrests black subjects in past pain and severs them from political and visual autonomy. Moreover, the photographed scar as “proof” of slavery’s injuries relies on a rhetoric of the *black body as evidence*, which not only substitutes African American testimony with speechlessness, but further reiterates conventions of “objectivity” and “truth” that racial science had earlier connected to the black body.
These two photographic evocations of racial pain bring into view a racializing dolorology that empowers white subjects and pathologizes and objectifies black bodies. Pain is enclosed in the mute, male, and black body, circumscribed as the object of the white scientific/sentimental gaze. Utilizing the visual conventions of racial photography, the abolitionist images produce a black body that (in its humanization) remains locked in a racialized notion of pain, manifested in the visually fetishized scar. The photographs of Gordon and Peter may bring the injurious practices of slavery to the intimate public sphere, but they do so by employing a dolorological discourse of the “other”—in which pain materializes the racial body not as (equally) human, but rather as cut off from its own vulnerability and thus humanity. In this dolorological logistics—where pain distributes and materializes racial difference—white compassion and humanitarian politics are enacted in the process of visualizing and viewing black pain, which is attached to a temporal pathology.

Looking at these pictures for white audiences instantiates “heroic occasions of [simultaneous] recognition, rescue, and inclusion” (Berlant 2008, 35). Visual authority, or the politics of visualization, equate the white compassionate subject with a fundamentally disembodied subjectivity that looks at hurt(ing) black bodies; a subjectivity that at the same time invests itself with total affective (feel with) and universal political (deal with) power. The black subjectivity these white humanitarian discourses produce figures as an included exclusion: while humanized by a disembodied yet sympathetic whiteness, “the wounded black body is walled off . . . to protect the national body from [pain’s] contamination” (King 2008, 5). While enlisting male black bodies in the registry of human suffering (and excluding black women), photographic abolitionism, in other words, simultaneously produces subjectivities that are isolated within the sentimental community, locked in a traumatically racialized body. Isabell Lorey calls this strategy of inclusive exclusion the “strategic immunization” of hegemonic discourse (2008): an absorption of the other without integration. The white gaze simultaneously incorporates black suffering in the national public sphere, and seals off the pain of slavery within the black body—thus, abolitionist discourse is able both to obscure the continuities of white supremacy (i.e., the complicity or similarities of Northern and Southern racial regimes), and to regulate the possibility of African American participation in national citizenship and “emotional universalism” (Berlant 2008, 37) after slavery. This process of visual immunization is at the same time orchestrated by a rearticulation of white male subjectivity and its relation to pain, slavery, and the nation. The next reading will look at this comparative representation of white pain, which regulates Gordon’s and Peter’s entry into a national dolorology, the discourse that distributes national meanings to bodies in pain.
Enlisting black bodies into national sentimental discourse as “novel objects of feeling” (Fisher 1985, 98) does not threaten the intellectual, humanitarian, or visual supremacy of white subjectivity, for recognition of black suffering fundamentally secures the superiority of white compassion. The increased presence of black suffering and the establishing of slavery as a national issue in the 1860s, however, necessitated a reassertion of whiteness as capable of not only compassion, but also a superior capacity for pain and feeling. In order to conceptualize the abolition of slavery as a problem pertaining to the nation (and not to white supremacy), white bodies also came to be represented as traumatized by slavery—albeit not in terms of racial oppression, but of national identity. As Linda Williams has pointed out, the sentimental novel and its highly gendered formulas of “romantic racialism” (2001, 57) had used “tears to cross racial barriers” (55), but further installed universalizing white figures as necessary intermediaries that simultaneously legitimized and moderated black pain in its relation to the national. She argues that the death of Little Eva in *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* instantiates such a scene of emotional intimacy achieved through white suffering:

The slaves weep for Eva who dies because of slavery and she, in turn, weeps for their enslaved state. Even Topsy succumbs to this tearful recognition of a white virtue overcome by the oppression of black suffering. Thus the novel asks its white readers to empathize with black suffering . . . through the medium of its white angel. When Eva finally dies, St. Clare, unable to bear Eva’s “mortal agony,” turns to Tom for comfort . . . slave and master bond in mutual sympathy for the . . . death of Evangeline. (55)

Common to sentimental texts, this setup of white mediating pain—making black suffering intelligible within the national—can also be found in the more immediate visual discourses of photography. While *The Scourged Back* propagated white alleviation of black pain, the advent of the war triggered a visual discourse that established the abolition of slavery as an increasingly national and decidedly white-embodied cause. Dissolving the issue of slavery into the question of the “Brother War,” white American bodies came to signify a national trauma that primarily threatened and disrupted Anglo-Saxon bodies. America was turning into “a Republic of Suffering,” as historian Drew Gilpin Faust writes: “Sacrifice and the state became inextricably intertwined. Citizen soldiers snatched from the midst of life generated [representational] obligations for a nation defining its purposes and polity through military struggle” (2009, 4–5). The Civil War provided
extensive depictions of white bodies in nationally meaningful pain. The images of Gordon and Peter had to compete with these white subjects for emotional citizenship—enrollment in the registry of those bodies suffering for the nation’s future.

One concise representation of white male suffering within a narration of national trauma can be found in a popular carte de visite issued also in 1863, entitled *The Brave Defenders of Our Country* and attributed to Chicago photographer John Carbutt (Fig. 4.5). The image, depicting three white men in a triangular composition, is taken in a studio environment, as the painted background trees and sky and the prop-like ragged flag reveal. The person seated on a wooden box on the left wears an unbuttoned Unionist’s uniform, and lifts the stump of his amputated leg to the observing and caring gaze of another man, dressed in a field doctor’s garment. Standing erect over the two, a man with an adjusted uniform looks compassionately down on the amputee, supporting him with his right hand while holding the tattered

flag in the left. Contrary to the bleak, isolating, and documentary display of a single wounded body in Gordon/Peter that reveals no particular setting or narration, Carbutt’s image stages a complex tableau of interwhite compassion. The picture composes a triangle of mutual care and responsibility that contextualizes and secures the wound at the center of various empathic gazes: the suffering amputee with closed eyes, the doctor leaning carefully over the stump, medication and bandages at his side, and the compassionate superior simultaneously reminding of and keeping up the national cause. The “spectacle of loss” (Silverman 1992, 67) provided by the missing leg and the clearly visible stump, is contained within a sentimental narration of white brotherly love and shared feeling, which transforms the realism of the wound into a national allegory; the lost leg references the instability of a nation divided by the “Brother War,” the necessary amputation of the seceding South, and the duty to suffer for America.

This presentation of the white body in pain however is not only allegorical. Its highly staged and theatrical setting equate a reenactment of a stock scene of war. This reenactment or recreation of the wounding is crucial to the ideological function of the image. It is obvious that the wound is fully healed, so the original scene of bodily disruption and care has occurred some time ago. Staging a performance that recreates this initial wounding, complete with the dramatized display of pain on the amputee’s face, indicates that these white men have “moved through” the trauma; they have mastered the pain. This ideological construction of masculinity that masters pain through repetition has been analyzed by Kaja Silverman in her groundbreaking book Male Subjectivity at the Margins: “Mastery . . . results when those same experiences are actively repeated—when they are linguistically rather than affectively reprised” (1992, 59). White pain in this picture is thus not “felt with” the man himself; his reprisal creates less a visceral affect than a structured, theatrical, and allegorical transformation of pain and wounding into national sacrifice. Repeating and signifying trauma in a theatrical, representational setup, white pain is able to escape a pathologizing reading. Bodily trauma is inserted into an affective and symbolically calculated tableau to reinstall national integrity and nationalist resolve. In contrast to The Scourged Back, where the black body appears simultaneously marked and unaffected by the scars, white pain enables a sentimental syntax that both fetishizes the shocking presence of the wound, and constructs the traumatized white male body as capable of controlling its meaning. The most striking difference between the abolitionist photographs of traumatized black bodies and this sentimental tableau of traumatized whiteness is thus the unity of ideological message and the bodies portrayed: while Gordon and Peter are circumscribed as self-displaying racial objects of the white gaze (which constructs a meaning of pain unavailable to black subjects), the
white figures are the *self-performing national subjects* of the photograph’s narration. Though white masculinity may thus be traumatized, hurt, or disabled, it does not get stuck in that trauma, but rather moves on to perform its own self-presentation. The three white soldiers here specifically figure as an allegory of the nation, and present the lost leg as nationally meaningful sacrifice. Viewing *The Scourged Back* and Carbutt’s set piece side by side, the photographic articulation of an *American dolorology* becomes obvious: this visual discourse separates racial pain and national pain, and aligns the bodily suffering of black and white male bodies in a hierarchy of national significance for postwar America.

The abolitionist images invested in racial trauma not only competed with these propagandistic efforts to instill national sentiment. Especially in the later war years and after, Civil War veterans seized on this visual tradition of national martyrdom to compensate for small or nonexistent veterans’ pensions. As Connor and Rhode argue, wounded soldiers visually exploited their bodily disabilities and traumata to financial ends, mainly to support pension claims against the state, or to bolster their income by selling their images as commercial prints (2003). In their article on the collection of medical photographs in the *Army Medical Museum* in Washington, the authors explain that veterans extensively seized on medical photographs taken of their mutilated bodies (Fig. 4.6) to assert claims to emotional citizenship, both to the state for financial support and their countrymen for patriotic compassion:

Soldiers used their photographs taken by the Museum [which] documented their injury and the extent of their disability while reminding the pension examiners of the faces of the men who had fought to preserve the Union. The ex-soldiers in these pictures reestablish their personal identity and presumably could not as easily be reduced to ‘anonymous,’ numbered supplicants” (Conner and Rhode 2003).

One example is a carte de visite of an unidentified soldier kept by the Library of Congress. The Unionist during the Civil War had endured a double amputation of both arms in 1864 and in later years sold this carte of himself in uniform to increase his income. Photographs such as these were extensively taken by medical professionals during and after the war, mainly to document medical progress, and to provide study and research material for surgeons and other medical professionals.

The handling of bodies in these images however is very different from the objectifying gazes in Agassiz’s racial daguerreotypes or *GORDON/PETER*. These soldiers readily *display* their individual bodily traumas—the
Figure 4.6. Surgical photographs, Army Medical Museum (photographed 1861–65, printed later). Summary: Photographs show men displaying the wounds received during the Civil War. Upper left: John Brink, Private; Upper right: Sergeant Warden; Lower left: Samuel H. Decker, Private; Lower right: Allison Shutter, Drummer. Source: Library of Congress, Photographs and Prints Division (LC-DIG-ppmsca-10105).
shot arm, amputated hands or arms—and their wounds are carefully contained, not only in their shock value, but also in their symbolic relation to the person. All figures address the camera directly; they are comforted by soft chairs and cushions or wear clothing that links them to their military past; the man with the missing hands (lower left image) exhibits his prosthetic devices together with his disability. The bodily traumata of these men are carefully revealed by rolled-up shirtsleeves, or lifted trousers. What these visual strategies amount to is that white bodies are not characterized by their injuries, but rather by how they have been taken care of as individuals. The traumatic/traumatizing force of the wound is controlled by sentimental props and postures that contain the hurt white body within the conventions of the photographic portrait, thus maintaining these bodies as patriotic subjects.

The pain and suffering that these pictures represent is thus differently composed from the images ascribing pain to black bodies. Here, the suffering for the nation is always already mastered, and it carries sentimental value for the present. The mutilated white subject is able to insert its bodily pain into the emotional public sphere on behalf of itself; bodily sacrifices made for the nation can be exchanged for compassionate response, veteran status, and financial payback. White pain has thus market value and is tied to an embodied subject with specific claims to pain as cultural capital. Black trauma, as displayed in GORDON/PETER, on the other hand, is both singularly shocking and “racially typical,” both incommensurable and sealed off in the black body. The white male body retains an autonomy of mastering and literally dealing with pain and injury that is fundamentally denied to the black. These exchange values and public functions of white suffering and their unavailability to black subjects demonstrate clearly the racializing implications of the dolorology articulated in abolitionist photography: the images of bodies in pain insert subjects into the affective economies of Civil War and postwar America. They do so by differently circumscribing the corporeal: traumatized, nostalgic, and fundamentally objectified for the black male subject, who is invested with a failed embodiment, while white male bodies are constructed as active in suffering, retaining their subject status, and allegorically identifying the “republic of suffering.”

These different visual formulas that link pain to racial difference expressed a racializing body politics and were thoroughly conflated with the sentimental-emancipatory politics of abolitionism. I have tried to argue this conflation by pointing to three contexts surrounding and structuring the visual processing of the black body in pain: (1) via the fetishization of the scar, body, wound, and experience are aligned to produce the black male subject as always caught within past trauma, fixed in a nostalgic temporality;
(2) the iconographic reiteration of the objectifying gazes, categories, and epistemologies of scientific racism, by which the black body is fundamentally silenced; and (3) the enfolding of African American trauma within an elaborate symbolic discourse of white masculinity that articulates racial superiority by dealing with pain, and transforms trauma into self-mastery, and national sacrifice. The abolitionist and compassionate gaze on the black body in pain signifies a complex constellation of “iconographical reflexes” (Spillers 2003, 206). These reflexes—as they insert the trauma of African Americans into public visual and sentimental discourse—argue visually for slave humanity and simultaneously reinscribe racial hierarchies that conceal possibilities for the discursive authority of black experience.

BIOPOLITICAL PORTRAITS

This chapter has so far argued that abolitionist photography created visual demarcations that not only supplanted the slave narrative with silent images of traumatized and fetishized black male bodies. They further were instrumental in creating a decisive gap between black bodies as capable of only racial pain, and white bodies signifying national suffering. Constructing this competition over nationally significant pain in exclusively male terms, these representations were flanked by visual articulations of pain in black women’s bodies. These, however, evoke black suffering in radically different terms and the remainder of this chapter presents two examples that demonstrate the dolorological enlistment of black femininity. My examples are the visual representation of the Margaret Garner case of 1866, and an extensive set of pictures published between 1863 and 1864 and depicting “redeemed slave children.” They do not conceptualize slavery (and thus postwar black subjectivity) in terms of bodily punishment as did Gordon and Peter, but rather gesture toward enslavement’s practices of sexual violation. In these representations, the issue of miscegenation and sexual exploitation in slavery is simultaneously articulated and silenced. The visual treatment of miscegenation invokes both “racial trauma” and “national trauma” in the terms of reproduction; while the Garner case enables a sort of heroic pathologization of black mothers (who kill their “illegitimate” children), the images of “white slave children” negotiate the anxieties of post-slavery white America with regard to racial amalgamation and the consequences of slavery’s kinship politics. Especially the pictures of children, by staging variously “colored” bodies in constellations of racial belonging and kinship, negotiate the future of racial meaning and racial demarcations. They invoke and negate images of the “black family” and thus “emancipated” black American populations, and the “illegitimate children” of miscegenation. While thus acknowledging racial amalgamation, these pictures also
reflect the emerging discourse concerned with racial purity (see previous chapter) that effectively supplants the “hard” racial order of slavery with that of postwar segregation of racial populations.

The images crucially produce what I call the biopolitical meanings of race and sexual violation with regard to both slavery as an “instance of biopolitical experimentation” (Mbembe 2003, 21) and the biopolitical future of a nation that would become multiracial through emancipation. These instances of racial biopolitics work through a particular dolorogical relay: while the sexual exploitation regimes of slavery are negotiated through the trauma of black motherhood, the “children of miscegenation” are visualized as instances of a future-oriented white national pain. Invested in the biopolitical futurity of racial hierarchies, these images supplement the memorial bodies of black masculinity associated with the always already past violence of slavery I have discussed so far.

MARGARET GARNER’S NECROPOLITICS

The most prominent example of representations of traumatized black motherhood in abolitionist discourse is the infamous story of Margaret Garner. In 1856, the fugitive slave had escaped with her husband Robert and four children from Kentucky to Ohio, and upon detection by pursuing slave catchers killed one of her children to save it from enslavement. Audiences in the North obsessed over Garner’s infanticide, and her controversial case was subject to much debate and conflicting efforts of empathy. As Reinhardt (2002) traces in his article on Garner’s story, abolitionist discourse treated her largely with sympathy. Garner was represented seldom as villain, but the killing of her daughter was taken as an indictment of slavery and an example of heroic behavior. The story of Margaret Garner was significant because it represented the suffering and desperation of enslaved women, and because it allowed to project the pain of slavery onto the issues of motherhood and family bonds. Garner figured as a simultaneously suffering and saving mother, who could not endure the enslavement of her children and thus attempted to kill them, succeeding only for her youngest daughter. The pastor P. S. Bassett, who visited her during imprisonment, pondered explicitly on the question of Garner’s temporary insanity, but finally attributed a “mother’s love” to her:

I inquired if she was not excited almost to madness when she committed the act. No, she replied, I was as cool as I am now; and would much rather kill them at once, and thus end their sufferings. . . . She alludes to the child that she killed as being free from all trouble and sorrow, with a degree of satisfaction that almost
chills the blood in one’s veins; yet she evidently possesses all the passionate tenderness of a mother’s love. She is about twenty-five years of age, and apparently possesses an average amount of kindness, with a vigorous intellect, and much energy of character. (quoted in Harris et al. 1974, 10)

Compassion for Garner was organized by installing the disruption of families and the severed bond of maternity at the heart of the slave experience—the dilemma that audiences empathized with was the matrilinearity of slave status, which mothers passed on to their children. The law functioned as a cornerstone to the slaveholder practice of breeding, that is, the simultaneity of sexual exploitation and reproduction of human capital. Slave law in this view granted a deadly form of recognition to motherhood while denying mothers themselves any affirmative agency or maternal rights. By dealing death to her daughter, Margaret Garner refused the social death imposed on her family and replaced the exploitation and destruction of kinship relations with the deadly logic of “motherly love,” which chooses death over enslavement—or, as Castronovo argues, articulates “death as freedom” (2000, 123).39

The Garner case, in other words, pushed the limits of what Jane Tompkins described as sentimentalism’s central symbolic narration—“salvation through motherly love” (1985,125)—but was nevertheless accepted and read within its terms. Abolitionist voices from Frederick Douglass—“every mother who, like Margaret Garner, plunges a knife into the bosom of her infant to save it from the hell of our Christian slavery, should be held and honored as a benefactress”—to the Anti-Slavery Bugle—“Let the spirit of this despairing mother seize upon her oppressed race over the South and the whole Union cannot enslave them”—underscored the exemplary nature of Garner’s equation of freedom and death (both quoted in Reinhardt 2002, 93).

In 1866, Garner’s case was visualized by Southern painter Thomas Satterwhite Noble, in an oil painting entitled The Modern Medea.40 A year later, on May 18, 1867, the painting was reproduced as engraving in Harper’s Weekly (Fig. 4.7), covering a whole page. In stark contrast to the silencing, documentary representations of Gordon or Peter, the picture imagines Garner as a strong figure of agency and resolve within a dramatic setting. Capturing the moment of confrontation with her white pursuers, the painting takes an unequivocal stance for the infanticidal mother. Instead of showing Garner with the knife she used to cut the throat of her child, the image represents her emptyhanded, executing a dramatic, accusatory gesture toward the recoiling and horrified men. She points to the dead child on the floor, her face expresses anger, and appears to hurl accusations toward the men.
In the visual setup of the illustration, Margaret Garner decidedly puts the blame on the white male aggressors and holds them accountable for their cruelty by seemingly offering them her dead child to take. Showing a peaceful smile of “salvation,” for it is beyond enslavement, the child’s body in turn acts as a threshold between the two parties in the illustration: death as freedom is the political gap enabling the slave subject to emancipate herself from the injurious grip of the master.

The picture dramatizes slave emancipation as a personal “necropolitics” (Mbembe 2003): the (re)production of death. By killing her daughter, Garner defiantly negates the pain and injuries of slavery as a self-repeating fate for her children and substitutes for it with death, thus keeping her maternal role and reproductive autonomy intact and averting the replication of pain: “She was unwilling to have her children suffer as she had done” (in Harris et al. 1974, 10), as the aforementioned pastor Bassett articulates. The case of Margaret Garner thus enables audiences to conceptualize black women’s pain as subjectivity as a different “state of exception”; the pain Garner is invested with is not primarily connected to a bodily state of exception (as in, e.g., The Scourged Back) that constructs a universally understandable experience, but one articulated within the familial bonds of motherly love.
which the sentimental mode understood as an equally universal emotion. As Reinhardt observes in his discussion of Lucy Stone Blackwell’s writing on the case, this “mother-state of exception” equally produces the black subject as circumscribed by silence and the unspeakable. Stone, a well-known abolitionist and women’s rights activist, had visited the imprisoned Garner and described her encounter in several sentimental accounts:

> When I came here and saw that poor fugitive, took her toil-hardened hand, and read in her face deep suffering and an ardent longing for freedom, I could not help bid her be of good cheer. I told her that a thousand hearts were aching for her, and they were glad that one child of hers was safe with the angels. Her only reply was a look of deep despair of anguish such as no word can speak. (quoted in Reinhardt 2002, 103; my italics)

Stone here sketches Margaret Garner both as a politically active subject who has committed a heroic deed and as a subject frozen in the unspeakability of that experience. The black female subject as mother thus is a politically dilemmatic figure, for its subjectivity is constructed via a “universally” understandable act of deviance that nevertheless cannot be spoken by the subject. Garner’s autonomy does not imply an African American or female voice, but is infused with a silence that again takes a white female body as an affective mediary.

As an iconic example of the suffering endured by female slaves, the abolitionist grip on Margaret Garner thus reveals both difference and similarity to the representations of the black male suffering of Gordon and Peter. The national registry of pain as a “true feeling” recognizes Margaret Garner as mother, her “point of entry” to the national matrix of suffering (for freedom) is reproductive. However, while Garner’s actions present a powerful (and fundamentally ambivalent) critique to white supremacy and the reproductive violence of slavery, their enlisting into (white) abolitionist discourse comes at a cost: even while recognizing and heroizing Garner’s defiant suffering, sentimental conventions lock her subject position within a fundamental political silence.

In addition to the sentimental (mis)recognition of the black mother’s pain, the discursive remodeling of Margaret Garner introduces another important aspect, again primarily through its disarticulation. As most contemporaneous reports on her case agreed upon (and few scholars have noted), Garner was mixed-race, as was the child she killed. Reinhardt collects some of the descriptions of Garner and her family which reiterate popular distinctions of shades of blackness:
Press reports describe Robert Garner as a “negro,” Margaret as a “mulatto” or “dark-skinned mulatto.” Margaret’s five-year-old Tom is described as “a negro,” and four-year-old Sam is a “mulatto,” while the dead daughter, Mary, is described as “almost” or “nearly white,” and infant Cilla is “much lighter in color” than her mother, even “light enough to show a red tinge in the cheeks.” (2002, 99–100)

These allusions to racial origin and a history of sexual violation are carefully elided in the postwar pictorial representations of Garner as well as in most scholarly discussions of the case. Noble’s painting and the Harper’s Weekly print (which both omit Cilla) depict Margaret Garner and her children as evenly dark-skinned. The killed child is represented as black, while its textual descriptions as an “almost white” girl reference its origin in either a racially illegitimate relation or the sexual violations of the master, with which the audience of these images had been familiarized by Harriet Jacobs’s narrative Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl (1861).

As postwar visual discourse unifies the Garner family in racial terms, it also radically inverts the meaning of the story: by making the Garners “evenly black,” the images disarticulate the issue of sexual violation and the meanings of miscegenation for black femininity, reproduction, and the nation after slave emancipation. The two images connote Garner’s radical (necro)politics—better to stop reproduction dead than have it reinserted into the plantation system—with a notion of “pure” blackness. The visual avoidance of racial amalgamation points to two aspects: on the one hand, it references the anxieties of collapsing the racial hierarchies that underwrote the Garner story. Garner’s actions are not readily intelligible within the generic conventions of the tragic mulatta, but resonate more closely with the trope of the noble savage who accepts death—not for the white man, but for freedom. Through this representation, the issues of white compassion and black silent, but heroic suffering are easily maintained, also without having to address the question of sexual exploitation that dehumanized female slaves.

The visual blackening of the Garner family by Noble further concerns the future of slavery. The Garner case, viewed through the lens of miscegenation, produced the question of the precarious status of “almost white” children being born within the breeding regimes of the plantation—and their respective fates at the hands of slaveholders and after the abolition of slavery. Since Garner’s case gained popularity precisely for the heroic deadliness of her “longing for freedom” and the self-willed refusal to reproduce children as slaves, it became problematic as a narration of racial amalgamation. Arguably, the infanticide of an “almost white” child at the hands of a black woman was not visually representable, whereas the trope of “salvation
through death” had been amply established for black characters by *Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (Williams 2001, 60). In other words, Noble’s visual discourse on Garner retroactively presents death as an acceptable and salvatory future prospect explicitly for the “black children” of “black women.” Given that both images appeared shortly after the end of the Civil War, the visual representation of Margaret Garner glorifies the black family’s “death-bound” self-determination precisely at a point when African Americans are able to reformulate the familial structures that slavery had denied them. The pictorial representation after the abolition of slavery reimagines the Garner story as an event within a “pure black family” and thus—crucial to postwar racial discourse—expresses not a narration of slave defiance and reproductive autonomy, but covertly argues the dysfunctionality and pathology of emancipated black families. As I argue in the following discussion of the visual archive of “white slave children,” this visual negation of black post-slavery kinship is further evoked to biopolitical ends.

**THE CHILDREN OF LOUISIANA**

>Dominant culture . . . misnames the power of the female regarding the enslaved community. Such naming is false, because the female could not, in fact, claim her child, and false, once again, because motherhood is not perceived . . . as a legitimate procedure of cultural inheritance.

—Hortense Spillers, *Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe*

The photographic archive frequently referred to as the *Redeemed Slave Series* constitutes the most extensive visual capture of “slaves” before the Federal Writers Project would extensively document five hundred African American “former slaves” from 1936–38. The photographs and cartes de visite from 1863 and 1864, which Kathleen Collins (1985b) has subsumed under the heading “Portraits of Slave Children,” circulated widely at the same time as *The Scourged Back*, and they inspired at least the same amount of fascinated compassion in white audiences. The portraits of predominantly white-looking slave children consist of two groups of pictures from different sources.

The earlier group comprises several portraits of a white-skinned girl named **Fanny Virginia Casseopia Lawrence** (Fig. 4.8), who was allegedly rescued from a Virginia plantation by the abolitionist Catherine S. Lawrence, and brought to New York. At least seventeen pictures of her, mostly displaying only her in elaborate dresses, bourgeois settings, and sincere, “educated” poses, were professionally taken and published in 1863 and 1864. Catherine Lawrence, who probably functioned as Fanny’s custodian, sold these cards in
order to raise money for the abolitionist activism of Henry Ward Beecher, who also figured as the institution converting Fanny to Christianity. Every card bears the following inscription: “Fanny Virginia Casseopia Lawrence, a redeemed slave child, five years of age as she appeared when found in slavery. Redeemed in Virginia by Catharine S. Lawrence; baptized in Brooklyn, at Plymouth Church by Henry Ward Beecher, May 1863.” The second, more diverse group of photographs was commissioned by Colonel George Hanks in 1864, obviously in an effort to copy Lawrence’s financial success. During the military presence of the Union army in Louisiana in 1863, Hanks had allegedly freed eight people—two boys, three girls, two adult men, one woman—from near New Orleans. Upon bringing them to the Northern states with the help of the National Freedman’s Relief Association, the “former slaves” were photographed in various constellations and settings, and the resulting cartes were sold to support schools for “freed-people.” This archive features
at least thirteen variously staged images of the predominantly light-skinned children (solo, or in groups) and black adults, and operate with diverse bourgeois props and scenes.

Despite some differences, these two sets of images negotiate similar aspects of national and racial identity. The immensely popular photographs—selling for twenty-five cents at the time—work symbolically on many levels; Mary Niall Mitchell calls them “spectacles with multiple meanings, inviting a combination of sympathy, speculation, voyeurism, and moral outrage” (2002, 373). While exploiting the white audience’s “fondness for the white child, understood as the embodiment of innocence” (Hall 2006, 89), and the sentimental iconography of bourgeois family albums and children's portraits, the images further capitalized on the popular Northern fascination with and compassion for “white slaves.” These functioned as mementoes for what was thought to be one of the most horrifying phenomena of slavery: white slaves denoted those children of black slave women and white slaveholders that were white-looking, but due to the “one drop rule” and the matrilinearity of slave status were regarded as black slaves. As Hazel Carby writes, “[The slave woman’s] reproductive destiny was bound to capital accumulation; black women gave birth to property and, directly, to capital itself in the form of slaves, and all slaves inherited their status from their mothers” (1987, 24–25). The presentation of light-skinned children in these pictures served to denounce the inhumanity of breeding practices of Southern slavers and, further, to provoke anxieties that white people might be enslaved if the Southern regime was not ended (see Mitchell 2002, 375–77).

However, the photographs of the Emancipated Slaves series feature elaborate stagings of mixed-race but white-looking children together with black adults and bourgeois props. The visual constellation of these “racialized items” indicates a more complex engagement with the issue of miscegenation, which will guide my discussion. The pictures’ publication date coincides with the first usages of the term *miscegenation*, which stirred controversy among Northern audiences arguing about abolition and the future of racial hierarchies. The term gained currency through pamphlets such as *What Miscegenation is! What We are to expect now that Mr. Lincoln is President* (1864) or popular satirical illustrations such as *The Miscegenation Ball* (1864). As Shawn Michelle Smith argues: “The specter of racial mixing generated profound white anxiety on the eve of emancipation, for the liberation of slaves promised to break down the rigid racial boundaries whereby interracial rape had worked to reproduce white patriarchal privilege” (1999, 37–39). The discourse of miscegenation in the 1860s reflected a shift in American racial logistics, for it constructed white and black racial reproduction no longer in the rigid paradigm of “breeding” and/or “sexual exploitation,” but rather in the biopolitical terms of managing the purity of racial populations.
The images of white “redeemed” slave children pointed white audiences to the problematic of a “white non-white progeny” (Mitchell 2002, 373) and the history of sexual violation, which on the one hand signified the pervasiveness of enslavement practices (producing even “white” children as slaves), and on the other referenced an unclear future for racial demarcations after emancipation.47 The photographs therefore negotiate the particular future of the racial order installed under slavery; by addressing the “racial fate” and “racial belonging” of children resulting from the regimes of sexual exploitation in the South, these images circumscribe the question of suffering from slavery not only within the terms of black emancipation, but also through a complex visualization of the suffering (and ultimately failing) African American family. For their white audiences, the images perform an act of “racial witnessing” (Foreman 2002, 516) that fixates the meanings of the pain of “black families” for the national future. I will in the following discuss the various iconographical alignments of whiteness, blackness, slavery, and emancipation and their biopolitical meanings as presented in the pictures.

Passing Over

I begin with a photograph of the FANNY series (Fig. 4.8), which is interesting because its scenographical setup resonates with Noble’s image of Margaret Garner. Sold as an elaborate carte with an oval framing, it resembled sentimental family portraits and thus provided a familiar visual setup to bourgeois audiences. The photograph stages, like the Modern Medea painting, a black woman on the right, looking toward a white elderly woman (probably Mrs. Lawrence, who had “redeemed” the child) on the right, with the raggedly dressed slave child FANNY in between these two figurations of motherhood. The two representatives of slavery gaze expectantly toward the white female redeemer, who has her gaze fixed somewhere outside the image, her composure and tight clutching of hands signaling resolve and decision to rescue the child. Where the Garner picture shows the black mother offering her dead black child to the ruthless and horrified white pursuers, this picture stages a black mother who quietly “passes over” her white child from (black) enslavement into white freedom and security.

The image stages what Gabrielle Foreman has called “white mulatta genealogies”; it dramatizes the subjectivity of FANNY as she is caught and mediated between racial categories and their respective national, political, and juridical meanings. The figure of the “white mulatta” and her passing between and questioning of monolithic racial categories for Foreman provided many nineteenth-century African American women writers48 with critical tools to “disrupt the binary racial meanings [and] press for more
fluidity in the sets of signifiers assigned to the classifications of white and black in the US and struggle for rights, recognition, and freedom” (2002, 506). The photograph however, while clearly staging the transgressive act of passing, enfolds FANNY’s literal in-betweenness within a hegemonic narration of white inclusion and exclusion: FANNY’s passing is dramatized as a passing over into whiteness legitimized by the white mother. While all the later images from the series elaborately support FANNY’s racial transformation via class-identifying dresses, poses, and props, the child’s imploring and anxious gaze toward the viewer indicates that whiteness is only granted to her through white compassionate recognition—a sentimental gesture of humanization and inclusion, which consumers of these images could repeat for themselves again and again.

This dramatization of allowing FANNY into whiteness is heightened by the marked difference in authority that characterizes the two figurations of motherhood. The photograph stages the black mother (who in all likelihood was servant to Mrs. Lawrence and not FANNY’s mother) as without agency, her gesture, rather, indicates a humble “letting go” of the child into the firm hands of the abolitionist and Christian white lady. Juxtaposed with the Garner print, this uneven competition between mother figures is interesting: where the representation of Garner had presented infanticide as a valid option for black mothers of black children, black mothers of white children are here explicitly called to accept their children’s racial “un-belonging” and “let them pass” into a precarious whiteness that needs to be constantly confirmed by the white gaze. The subtext of miscegenation, sexual violence, and the incoherence of racial demarcations is thus mollified by a reformulated sentimental tale of “redemption through (white) motherly love.” Where black maternity had been shown to exert salvation to death (as freedom), Mrs. Lawrence appears to signify the compassionate white woman’s love that offers a proper redemption of the innocent girl and subsequent inclusion into the white nation. Viewed together, FANNY and the Garner picture implicitly reverse the distribution of life and death between master and slave: whereas Garner is equated with a necropolitically sovereign motherhood, white motherhood here presents the sovereign production of future, legitimate forms of white American life—or, white biopolitics.

Theatrical Slavery

This failure of black maternity, unable to claim the white-looking child for an emancipated racial future, is echoed in the representation of black masculinity in the Emancipated Slave series. The discourse on miscegenation and slavery situated black men in a sexually and racially marginal position, since interracial relations were exclusively constructed as occurring between
white master and black female slaves. Miscegenation thus worked through the “provisions of [white] patriarchy” (Spillers 1987, 80), and racially mixed children were connected to “a Fatherland of ‘whiteness’ that promised (material) racial rewards, recognition, and inheritance” (2002, 506). Black men signified thus within the miscegenation discourse as either racially immobile and sexually powerless figures, or—within what Gabriele Dietze succinctly calls the “rape-lynching-complex” (Dietze 2013)—as brutal sexual predators of white women. White patriarchy figures invisibly in the photographs in two ways: on the one hand, the illegitimate white slaveholder(s) who produced the “slave children,” most likely through sexual coercion; on the other, in the fathering presence of Rev. Henry Ward Beecher, who according to the images’ inscriptions, had baptized the children and thus adopted them into the Christian family.

Black masculinity is featured in the photograph of Wilson Chinn, whom the Harper’s Weekly article describes as “about 60 years old.” The

Figure 4.9. Wilson Chinn, a Branded Slave from Louisiana. Also exhibiting Instruments of Torture used to punish Slaves. Carte de visite (1863). Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (LC-USZ62-90345).
image is inscribed “Wilson Chinn, a Branded Slave from Louisiana. Also exhibiting Instruments of Torture used to punish Slaves” (Fig. 4.9). In front of a bleak background, the man stands calm and erect, one arm angled upward. He is dressed in coarse, simple jacket and trousers. A heavy chain is fastened to his left ankle, he carries a iron collar with long, upward-turned spikes around the neck, and by his feet lies an assortment of what seems to be a double-tongued lash and a spiked paddle. While the visual dramatization of Fanny and her exchange between two racially significant mother figures is invested in both issues of sexual violation and the negotiation of racial demarcations, Wilson’s portrait is thoroughly circumscribed in the past violence of slavery. Though he is technically also “redeemed,” this status is not narrated in the inscription and he is portrayed literally as still caught in the brutality of slavery’s punishment practices: his body is staged and dressed for an equally didactic and theatrical performance of the “instruments of torture” white audiences had learned to connect to Southern slavery. Interestingly however, the image does not explicitly reveal the branded initials on Wilson’s forehead, which the description in Harper’s Weekly elaborately narrates and the inscription mentions:

When 21 years old he was taken down the river and sold to Volsey B. Marmillion, a sugar planter about 45 miles above New Orleans. This man was accustomed to brand his negroes, and Wilson has on his forehead the letters “V. B. M.” Of the 210 slaves on this plantation 105 left at one time and came into the Union camp. Thirty of them had been branded like cattle with a hot iron, four of them on the forehead, and the others on the breast or arm.

In a similar way that Gordon focuses an objectifying and sympathetic gaze on the traces of violation, here the black male body appears as a passive memento to past injuries of enslavement, which he cannot forget. While the primary effect of Wilson’s “exhibition” of torture instruments may have been both didactic and thrilling to white Northern audiences, the mise en scène of the black male body’s almost compulsive reenactment of corporeal punishment practices again freezes him in a pathological relation to an always already past racial trauma. The powerlessness figured in the black mother is thus supplemented by a traumatized male figure. In combination with the predominantly white-looking children, these images construct African American family structures as fundamentally dysfunctional or nonexistent. The futurity of black subjectivity in these images is circumscribed by loss and the stoic acceptance of past hurt.
National Protection

While the *Emancipated Slave* series constructed the failure of African American parentage and consequently produced variously traumatized gendered black subjects, it also made the national futurity of the slave children visually explicit. In the diverse arrangements of the three whitest-looking children—Rosa, Charley, and Rebecca—two pictures especially dramatize the issue of national citizenship and emotional recognition via the sentimental iconography of the flag. One shows the eleven-year-old Rebecca—described in *Harper’s Weekly* as “perfectly white . . . complexion, hair, and features show not the slightest trace of negro blood”—kneeling and praying to an elaborately draped Union flag. The image is entitled *Oh! How I Love The Old Flag* (Fig. 4.10). Similarly explicit about the inclusion of the children

Figure 4.10. Oh, How I Love The Old Flag. Rebecca, A Slave Girl from New Orleans. Carte de visite (1864). Source: Library of Congress, Prints and Photographs Division (LC-DIG-pmsca-11124).
into a white nation is a photograph carrying the inscription *Our Protection* (Fig. 4.11). Here, the three children are wrapped almost fully in the comforting cloth of three American flags. While the two girls—leaning on their companion in the middle—look anxiously toward the viewer, the tall-standing Charley—the *Harper’s Weekly* description is “very fair, his hair light and silky”—gazes confidently toward his future. Inclusion into the white nation here produces a peculiar iconography of disembodiment, as the photographs perform two things via the usage of flags: they contain the children’s precarious status within the racialized nation by an innocent display of “child’s play” with the national symbol. And further, the protective cloth literally enwraps the children’s racial vulnerability (connoting their histories of sexual exploitation) within an act of national disembodiment; in contrast to the exposures of black bodies I have discussed earlier, these images hide the body scrutinized for racial meaning and provide their subjects with a

particularly white national invulnerability. Especially Charley, whose slave status the newspapers repeatedly declared as unbelievable (“Three out of five boys in any school in New York are darker than he!”) because of his perfect whiteness, seems to be able to claim white male Americanness without the confirming gaze of the viewer.

**Miscegenation Portrait**

The white trio of Charley, Rebecca, and Rosa catered perfectly to Northern desires for easily assimilable images of interracial mixing. Their performance of white belonging lead to the eventual dismissal of the other “redeemed” children, Isaac and Augusta, from the photographic project to rescue slave children through white compassionate gazes. As Mitchell writes: “When the sponsors opted to take the children on to Philadelphia for more appearance and sittings in photography studios, Isaac and Augusta were left behind” (2002, 372). The *Harper’s Weekly* article describes no spectacular white features for them, but instead remarks on composition of family, or the comparative intelligence of the two children—both markers attesting to racial identity:

Augusta Boujey is nine years old. Her mother, who is almost white, was owned by her half-brother, named Solamon, who still retains two of her children. Isaac White is a black boy of eight years; but none the less intelligent than his whiter companions. He has been in school about seven months, and I venture to say that not one boy in fifty would have made as much improvement in that space of time.

Isaac and Augusta are represented in a photograph entitled simply *White and Black Slaves* (Fig. 4.12), which shows the two alongside a redeemed adult, Mary Johnson. The image makes no use of national imagery or sentimental props, but speaks directly to the issue of miscegenation and the racial makeup of the future nation. Audiences read it as a racial portrait of the problematic familial structures resulting from slavery, which through the simultaneity of sexual exploitation by white masters and slave marriages could indeed consist of “white and black slaves.” The assembled “family” in the picture is presented as highly unstable and pathologic; lacking a paternal figure, the maternal figure’s blackness is presented as dividing the two children, exhibiting the precarious status of black maternity. The whiter child, Augusta, seems removed from the family triangle and caught in a melancholy gaze, for the viewer signifying the tragic mulatta’s pain of being recognized within a racialized family to which she does not seem to belong.
The fascination with children, racial demarcations, and the nation in the *Emancipated Slave* series is associated with a further ideological and iconographic context: the cultural practice of photographic family albums, its preoccupation with “properties of the blood” (Smith 1999, 113–35), and its eventual functionalization within the eugenicist reformulation of racial identity. These albums achieved full popularity after Francis Galton’s publications on eugenics (e.g., *Hereditary Genius*, 1869), but also during the Civil War constituted an important cultural practice imbued with notions of racial purity. Tracing parallels between middle-class self-representations such as photographic family trees and Galton’s photographic work on racial heredity, Shawn Michelle Smith argues that

the association of photography with the reproduction of national identities continued throughout the nineteenth century, but by the turn of the century, the “nation” itself was posed as a racial construct. Indeed it is between the two terms of the family and the nation that Francis Galton located the site of racial reproduction. For Galton, the nation was simply a congregation of racialized families. [Thus,] photographs of live babies came to signify in racial terms in a culture permeated by eugenicist thought. (1999, 116–17)

The images of “white non-white” children resonate closely with this context. Read as exemplary photographic racial genealogies, the pictures of slave children and their fictional families reorganized whiteness and blackness for bourgeois audiences in America; by looking miscegenation in its “children’s eyes,” the images evoked thus not only sympathy for the “victims” of racial amalgamation, but also introduced the white viewer to a revised regime of family-centered race consciousness and the cultural technology of the “racialized gaze” (Hall 2006, 96).

The image Black and White Slaves, and the two series of Fanny and Emancipated Slaves in general, crucially negotiated the meanings of race for post-slavery America. Visualizing directly the corporeal repercussions of miscegenation, racial amalgamation, and sexual violation within the plantation system, these pictures visually redistributed racial belongings among children and adults. “White-enough” children were incorporated into an iconography of upper-class and national belonging, while the “too-black” children were integrated into portraits of failing black families, signified through powerless black mother figures and fathers trapped in slavery. As a visual discourse on the pain and (possible) “healing” of miscegenation, these images negotiate the fault lines between two symbolic bodies; the white-looking children are represented on behalf of a “white national body,” threatened by racial mixing and the scandal of commodified white bodies. Their bodies are enveloped in visual redemption narratives of racial passing, sanctioned by benevolent white mothers or the bodily protection of the flag. While these narratives of national healing visually secure white bodies, the “blacker” children and adults signify the racial pain of black collectivity. Here, miscegenation is visualized by racially uneven families. Post-slavery black kinship structures and reproduction are portrayed as traumatized and failing.

The visual reformulations of “whiteness,” “blackness,” and “interraci-ality” in these images thus project the trauma of miscegenation onto two newly formed, but immediately separated collective bodies: the “racialized” body of the emancipated black population, and the “racial” body of the
reunified white nation. By negotiating the painful boundaries between these collectivities and corporealities, the images enact the shift from Southern racial order to the postwar paradigm of segregated racial populations. The *Emancipated Slaves* series thus projects the racial differences of slavery—where race was secured by the dialectic of master/slave and human/thing—onto the domain of biopolitics, where the nation is constructed as a “congregation of racialized families” and populations to be observed, regulated, and carefully managed. It aligns the visual characteristics of different racial bodies with different possibilities of integration into the white national body. These different bodies have different possibilities of accessing racial pain and national healing; while an image such as *Black and White Slaves* imagines the “black race” as irrevocably traumatized by miscegenation and slavery, the picture of Rosa, Charley, and Rebecca wrapped in the flag stages an inclusionary portrait for white bodies. Importantly, the images transform the legal codes of slavery—e.g., the matrilinearity of slave status—into “visual codes” that allow the viewer to scrutinize, negotiate, and sanction bodies in terms of their racial purity and thus their function in the “separate but equal” racial order of postwar America.

The notion of race, according to Foucault, functions within biopolitical rule by “establishing a biological type caesura within a population that appears to be a biological domain. This will allow power to treat that population as a mixture of races, or to be more accurate, to treat the species, to subdivide the species it controls, into the subspecies known, precisely, as races. That is the first function of racism: to fragment, to create caesuras within the biological continuum addressed by biopower” (Foucault 1997, 254–55). While “race” within American institutionalized slavery—orchestrated by legal, scientific, social, and economic registers—worked to separate master and slaves, the caesura created in these racial portraits fundamentally reinscribe racial difference in biopolitical terms. These *biopolitical portraits* form a part of photographic abolitionism, and they crucially transpose the discourse over slavery as a violation of black “humanity” into a discourse of the *racial composition* of the nation as an assemblage of different, biologically separate racial groups. The racist logistics of slavery are reformulated as demarcations articulated in bloodlines, skin colors, and genealogies. While the images therefore may also offer sentimental narrations of racial redemption, racial mobility, and inclusion, their biopolitical message is essentially “conservative” in Douglass’s sense. As Rachel Hall writes: “The freezing power of photography assured white viewers that, despite the revolutionary changes taking place in the United States, the nation would remain white. Like a photograph soaked in the proper chemical solution, the nation’s composition was fixed” (2006, 90; my italics).
PICTURING RACIAL PAIN

VISUAL DOLOROLOGIES

In Frederick Douglass’s speech on “Pictures and Progress” (1861), which introduced this chapter, the prominent abolitionist argued for an American body unified in the fight against institutionalized slavery: “They are not conducting the war on war principles. . . . We are striking with our white hand, while our black one is chained behind us. We are catching slaves instead of arming them” (Douglass 1985[1861], 467). Douglass furiously reminded his white audience that emancipation for him demanded a full incorporation of sovereign members into one national, multiracial body. The sentimental documents of photographic abolitionism I have presented in this chapter reflect the highly ambivalent terms in which this incorporation was imagined, regulated, and displaced in the visual discourse on slavery. The images, part of a visual propaganda effort to instill white compassion for black bodies, seek to articulate the issues of slavery and abolitionism in their affective dimension. They present the hurt bodies of male slaves, the soldiers suffering for America, the traumatized black mother, the melancholic child of miscegenation. All images address a national body that compassionately feels with these “bodies in pain,” and relates their suffering to national and racial meanings. As I have argued, these two contexts are carefully separated by the visual and paratextual rhetoric of these images and associated with different bodies articulated through their different racial and national belongings. Abolitionist photography—while enacting a “humanization” of the commodified slave body by granting it “vulnerability”—thus prescribes which bodies feel pain as “Americans” and which suffer as “racial bodies.” While the black male body, for example, is constructed as the eternally hurt living memento to the black race’s trauma of slavery, the bodies of interracial children are variously invested with the future of the racial nation. The national or racial significance of pain is further imbricated with a temporal dialectic of pastness and futurity; as Rachel Hall suggests, the parallel emergence of photographic images of the (black) “suffering slave” (The Scourged Back) and the (whiter) “redeemed slave” (Our Protection) articulates an ideological rhetoric of “before/after” emancipation: “The suffering slave and the redeemed child were idealized types that worked in tandem: in a strange reversal the adult became the ‘before’ to the child’s ‘after’ picture” (2006, 90).

While the images therefore articulate a visual dolorology that distributes the meanings of “bodies in pain,” their construction of black bodies as significant of “racial trauma” and of white bodies as signifying “national healing” is simultaneously a negotiation of which bodies matter in what way to post-slavery America. The crucial juxtaposition of Gordon’s/Peter’s
scars (signifying the always already past injuries of slavery) and the protected bodies of “white slaves” (representing the inclusionary “redemption” of slave humanity) illustrates this alignment of temporal, racial, and national belongings. The “before/after” effect created in this constellation not only evokes the notion of a successful transformation, but further enacts the crucial shift to “seeing” race in biopolitical terms; in the visual distance separating The Scourged Back and the Miscegenation Portrait, the meaning of racial difference is transformed from the master/slave dialectic to the calculus of blood mixtures, skin colors, the racial integrity of families, genealogies, and populations. This shift crucially undergirded the continuity of racial thinking in reconstructionist and segregationist America.

The centrality of miscegenation for the biopolitical circumscription of race is doubly powerful: the symbolic, visual inclusion of the white body of FANNY—where “blackness” can be assimilated because it is invisible—enfolds racial mixing in a narrative of white benevolence and compassion for the girl’s precarious whiteness. On the other hand, the family portrait of ISAAC, AUGUSTA, and MARY JOHNSON ascribes the issue of miscegenation and racial amalgamation primarily as the pain of fragmented and pathological black families. While the previous chapter demonstrated how the “insensitivity” of black female slaves served as a relay over which white women’s bodies is subjected to a biopolitical discourse on fertility and racial purity, photographic abolitionism produced the image of black reproduction as the site of pathology and trauma. This figuration enables not only the construction of racial amalgamation as a national problem emerging from and attached to black bodies (and thus calling for segregational measures), but also the counterimage of an imperiled whiteness threatened by “race suicide.” The two prominent figures of “racial hurt” evoked in these photos—united in the fragmented black family—therefore served as the backdrop against which the biopolitical meanings of “race” could be installed for postwar America: the eternally hurt (but never dead) black male slave body, and the traumatized black mother producing racially alienated children. The present absence of white men, and white male sexual violation, attests to the white patriarchial provisions maintained in these pictures.

The visual recognition of “racial pain” in antislavery photography therefore does not cause the negation or crisis of what Paul Gilroy (2000) calls “raciology,” but merely transforms its terms. While the comparative dolorology unfolded in photographic abolitionism around 1863 enlisted black bodies into a national visual discourse as “novel objects of feelings” (Fisher 1985, 98), their emergence did not necessarily threaten white supremacy, the paradigm of the “white gaze,” the white privilege of compassion, or the equation of the nation with whiteness. Rather, the different visual formulas that link bodily pain to racial or national meanings further articulate race
within the domain of biopolitics, and crucially link it to ways of seeing race. The pictures not merely reiterated the “representational colonialism” (Wallis 1995, 54) presented by the visual conventions of racial science, but further transposed it into a visual biopolitics. The iconography of biopolitics amounts, as I have shown, to a racial aesthetics, where the raciality of subjects is associated with powerful visual archetypes: the hurt black male, the traumatized and sexualized black mother, the tragic mulatta. Among others, Paul Gilroy has argued for a revision of scholarship on raciology that would have to appreciate and investigate the crucial visuality of racial discourse. What he writes on the visual practices of racial science in the nineteenth century should also be maintained for the visual archive of abolitionism:

The enduring power of . . . visual material . . . was more than an iconic counterpoint to the inscription of respectable racial science. It raises the interesting possibility that cognition of “race” was never an exclusively linguistic process and involved from its inception a distinctive visual and optical imaginary. . . . [T]his race-producing activity required a synthesis of logos with icon, of formal scientific rationality with something else—something visual and aesthetic in both senses of that slippery word. Together they resulted in a specific relationship to, and mode of observing, the body. (2000, 35; my italics)

As a means of concluding this chapter, I want to briefly point out two contexts in which the visual archetypes of “racial suffering” established by photographic abolitionism can be used to revise scholarly readings—one historical, and one pertaining to theorization.

The photographs articulate two archetypal figurations of the black body in pain—a stoic and resilient, yet eternally hurt black male body that though always already hurt and dehumanized, seemingly never dies; and a traumatized black female body, linked to racial impurity and pathological reproduction. This particular convergence of sexuality, violation, and notions of racial transgression figured by black bodies relates to Gabriele Dietze’s discussion of the “rape/lynching complex” (Dietze 2013), which crucially structures racial relations and anxieties of pre–civil rights America. I would argue that the almost phantasmic amount of visible vulnerability attributed to black male bodies in abolitionist photography contributes to the legitimization of the excesses of violence and visibility in Southern lynchings. As Linda Hentschel (2010) has recently suggested, these lynchings, attended by large white crowds and memorialized in photographs and postcards, were also crucially visual practices, where cross-racial gazes were brutally sanctioned and reversed. The particular figuration of black subjectivity articulated in
pictures such as *The Scourged Back*—invested with an endless vulnerability that the black subject can never fully realize—has in the “rape/lynching complex” led to an excess of white violation of black male bodies that never can hurt and kill enough, and never can produce enough visibility for both white racial purity and black hurt. In alteration of Richard Dyer’s statement, it could be said that the never fully human vulnerability attributed to the black body legitimizes the endlessly inhuman practice of lynching: “If blacks have more ‘life’ than whites, then it must follow that whites have [and do] more ‘death’ than blacks” (1993, 141).

The second intervention concerns the epistemological and political implications of dealing with the visual documents of abolitionism today. As I have argued, the image *The Scourged Back* today is frequently employed not only as a cipher for the trauma caused by American enslavement, if only for its often silencing shock value. The picture hence enables not only the highly ambivalent effect of “affective compassion” with the body represented, but also the displacement of analytic descriptions of slavery and racism as systems of practices, discourses, and materialities through the evidentiality of the visualized body. What I have pointed out as the visual state of exception enforced by the shocking display of this picture, supplements a rhetoric of the “unspeakable” with the undeniability of the visible. Naomi Mandel has thoughtfully criticized this silencing rhetoric surrounding the representation of and discourse on human atrocity: “Rhetorical production is conflated with objective fact, a conflation anchored by this injunction: not only is atrocity unspeakable, it must remain so. This conflation, I argue, enables the masquerade of rhetorical performance (evoking the unspeakable) as ethical practice (protecting survivors, respecting the memory of the victims, safeguarding identity, reality, or historical truth)” (2006, 209). Apart from the ethical implications of using visual documents that support the notion of “unspeakable trauma,” uncritically using these shocking pictures also reiterates an iconography of racial suffering and racial embodiment, without acknowledging their racializing and gendering discursive effects—or, as my chapter has demonstrated, their dolorological functions. This fixating iconography has been critically called into question by several scholars, most forcefully by Hortense Spillers, who maintains that these views on the violated black body in themselves enact the displacement of another history of experience. Writing on black embodiment in the shadow of American slavery, Spillers contends that the body that becomes socially visible and intelligible as gendered and racialized—i.e., the body that is in view—always conceals a form of “anti-embodiment” that is fundamental to enslavement, which she calls the flesh:

I would make a distinction in this case between “body” and “flesh” and impose that distinction as the central one between captivated
PICTURING RACIAL PAIN

and liberated subject-positions. In that sense, before the “body” there is the “flesh,” that zero-degree of social conceptualization that does not escape concealment under the brush of discourse or the reflexes of iconography. (Spillers 2003, 206)

In my understanding of Spillers’s argument, the “flesh” may stand in for that state of nonbeing, nonintelligibility, and unspeakability inhabited by the enslaved person. Importantly, the “flesh” does not denote something anterior or exterior to discourse and narration. Instead, Spillers calls the “flesh” a “primary narrative . . . its seared, divided, ripped-apartness, riveted to the ship’s hole, fallen, or ‘escaped’ overboard” (Spillers 2003, 206). To delineate the historicity of this primary narrative would mean to engage with the meticulous processes of dismemberment in their technicality and taxonomy of “taking apart” bodies. The “body”—as it is discursively and iconographically constructed in representation—for Spillers is thus always engaged in the concealment of the captivated subject’s corporeal history of violation. Views seeking to “capture” the black body—such as the documents of photographic abolitionism—partake in an incessant discursive work of concealment, a process that produces the socially intelligible body of the “liberated subject” and inevitably covers up the “flesh.”

To unriddle the narratives of the “flesh” has been called for by Bibi Bakare-Yusuf as a predicament for a history of the “lived body” in general. In her article “The Economy of Violence: Black Bodies and the Unspeakable Terror” (1999), she exposes the shortcomings of a history of the body that fails to engage with the commodification and abnegation of bodies and bodily experience in enslavement. Drawing on the notion of the “flesh” as site of an alternate corporeal history, her argument executes a radical critique of Elaine Scarry’s axiom of pain’s anti-epistemological status, and argues for a historicizing and discursive understanding of pain and violence within a history of the body. She states that Scarry’s anti-epistemology of pain obscures how pain is systematically circulated as a currency in organized forms of subjugation such as American chattel slavery, and continues to circulate in the construction and representation of black bodies. The “black body in pain”—though evoked in compassionate terms—always partakes in a white supremacist discourse of “active and systematic deconstruction” (318) of black subjectivity. The academic insistence on the “unspeakability” of pain, and the simultaneous canonization of representations of African American suffering consequently obscure pain’s decisive function in the ongoing production of dehumanizing notions of race.