



*Sojourner Truth, Photography,
and the Fight Against Slavery*



What Is a *Carte de Visite*?

First invented and patented in 1854 by French photographer André-Adolphe-Eugène Disdéri, *cartes de visite* were substitutes for calling cards. Sustaining the calling card's small size, approximately two-and-one-half by four inches, *cartes de visite* consisted of albumen photographs made from glass negatives glued onto cardboard mounts. The production of multiple portraits had been made cheap and easy by Disdéri's invention of a special camera with four lenses so that a single negative could include four shots on the same plate.

By the end of the 1850s, the craze for the relatively inexpensive *cartes de visite* had reached the United States. Americans who could never have afforded a painted or daguerreotype portrait, or even a relatively inexpensive tintype, could now have their likenesses memorialized. Combining affordability, repeatability, and portability across great distances thanks to the new US postal system, these cards appealed to a vast nation of dispersed people.

As this exhibition demonstrates, *cartes de visite* could aggrandize the formerly enslaved, delivering them into the personhood of portraiture, but they could also be used to memorialize war heroes or denigrate the enemy. In either case, these modest objects were tools of war.

Unless otherwise noted, all works collection of the University of California, Berkeley Art Museum and Pacific Film Archive, gifts of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby.

All works albumen prints mounted on cardboard, unless otherwise noted.

Texts adapted from Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, *Enduring Truths: Sojourner's Shadows and Substance* (University of Chicago Press, 2015), available in the BAMPFA Store.

Sojourner Truth, Photography, and the Fight Against Slavery is organized by Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby, Richard and Rhoda Goldman Distinguished Professor in the Arts and Humanities at UC Berkeley, with the assistance of Assistant Curator Stephanie Cannizzo and UC Berkeley undergraduate Ryan Serpa.

Who Was Sojourner Truth?

She was born a slave named Isabella Baumfree, perhaps in 1797.

She spoke Dutch as her first language in an upstate New York community.

She could neither read nor write. She signed her “mark” to petitions.

She was probably thirteen years old when she was sold by her first owner in 1810 for a hundred dollars and separated from her parents.

She was beaten as a slave; she also lost a portion of her right index finger in a field accident in 1826.

She bore five children between 1815 and 1826, one of whom died.

She ran away from her last owner in 1826, at the age of thirty, after completing the spinning of one hundred pounds of wool, work that she felt she owed him.

She renamed herself Sojourner Truth in 1843 at the age of forty-six.

She chose to go to court three times and won all three cases. In 1828 she litigated to recover her son Peter who had been illegally sold into slavery. In 1832 she filed a slander suit. In 1865 she brought assault charges against a Washington, DC, streetcar conductor who tried to throw her off his car; he was dismissed from his job.

She wrote an autobiography with the help of two different women friends and paid for its first printing in 1850 on credit; she reissued the book in 1875, 1878, and 1881.

She had newspapers read to her and frequently published letters in the press.

She campaigned on behalf of the abolition of slavery, the right of African Americans and women to vote, the right of emancipated slaves to education and property, the desegregation of streetcars, and the elimination of capital punishment.

She was a moving speaker. According to a Quaker abolitionist, she “poured forth a torrent of natural eloquence which swept everything before it.”

She worked tirelessly from 1864 to 1867 on behalf of the thousands of emancipated Southern slaves refuted at the Freedmen’s Village in Washington, DC.

She filed petitions with Congress and paid to have petitions printed.

She tried to vote several times in advance of female suffrage, but was turned away from the polls.

She collected autographs of famous persons, despite having no signature of her own, and compiled three scrapbooks with press clippings about abolitionism and her activism.

She knew the Bible, but she also embraced modernity and technological inventions such as photography.

She posed for photographic portraits, primarily *cartes de visite*, at least eleven different times, mostly during the years of the Civil War when she was in her late sixties, but also in the years immediately prior to her death in 1883.

She had a copyright filed in her name for her *cartes de visite* in 1864, which was unprecedented for a portrait sitter: usually copyrights were filed in the name of the photographer. The copyright appeared on the backs of her portraits; at the same time, she added her name and a caption to the front.

She sold her photographs at her lectures and through the mail in order to support herself.

She died at her home in Battle Creek, Michigan, on November 26, 1883.

CIVIL WAR

1 The Innocent Cause of the War (stereo view), c. 1865

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

A Union soldier looks at a young black boy in tattered clothing leaning on a pole at left. The caption turns the boy into “the innocent cause” for which the Civil War was fought. Stereo views were two photographs made from slightly separated lenses, reproducing the two-and-one-half-inch distance between our eyes; when seen through a viewer, they suggest three-dimensional space. Fairly inexpensive, they were very popular from the Civil War era through the early twentieth century. Stereo views were collected by individuals, and they also served as educational tools in schools and libraries.

2 A Group of Contrabands (stereo view), c. 1865

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

This stereo view shows a group of “contrabands,” slaves who had escaped from the South. Here the photographer shows us such a group, “happy and thankful if permitted to remain under the protection of Massa Linkum’s Soldiers,” according to the inscription on the back.

3 Portrait of Marshall Bachelder and Cornelia (Weatherby) Bachelder, c. 1866–67; tintype with hand-coloring

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

Cartes de visite were multiples and allowed sitters to share their portraits with others, sometimes sending them by mail. By contrast, tintypes were unique images like daguerreotypes, but far less expensive.

This haunting hand-colored tintype portrait of a couple contrasts a remarkably vivid young woman with a pale ghost-like soldier whose body, hair, and eyes have been drawn in. Whether his image was radically retouched in order to dress him in uniform is unclear from the photograph itself. Tintypes were made by creating a direct positive on a thin sheet of metal covered with a dark lacquer or enamel—they were unique direct images (no negatives were used).

4 Pro-Union *carte de visite* commemorating the 76th Ohio Volunteer Infantry and Generals Charles Robert Woods and William Burnham Woods, c. 1865

Most *cartes de visite* were portraits but some represented the war, depicting landscapes, battle sites, military prisons, and still lifes. This *carte*, made by Sayre and Chase of Newark, Ohio, displays the scarred battle flag of the 76th Ohio Volunteer Infantry as well as a sword, scabbard, and officer’s sash hanging from a line perfunctorily stretched across the studio. Leaning against the floorboards are two large, framed albumen photographs of Union generals, Charles Robert Woods (at right), who organized the 76th Ohio, and his brother William Burnham Woods. Both survived the war, and astonishingly both became Supreme Court justices. Within this scene, the framed photographic portraits are not *cartes de visite* but larger prints deemed worthy of frames, not merely inclusion in an album.

Photography’s registration of “what has been” (its indexicality) serves as a form of evidence: here scarred inanimate objects testify to the violence of war and connote both courage and suffering.

SOJOURNER TRUTH’S UNCAPTIONED CARTES DE VISITE

5 *Carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth, c. 1861 Chicago History Museum

In this earliest extant photographic portrait of Truth, a *carte de visite*, she is depicted prior to delivering a speech to a hostile, proslavery crowd in Angola, Indiana, at the very beginning of the Civil War. Truth is swaddled in a patriotic, vaguely military costume, which was apparently intended to protect her by enfolding her within the regiment of armed Union soldiers who served as her bodyguards. Truth herself was “frightened” when she looked in the mirror after being dressed by the abolitionist supporters who wished to shield her. The excesses of the costume suggest the extent to which abolitionists felt they had to hide the black body in order to minimize its incendiary power.

6 Captioned *carte de visite* (Emancipation), 1863

The women abolitionists of Indiana who selected the costume Truth wears in the adjacent photograph (no. 5) may have been inspired by pictures of female personifications carrying flags. For example, this *carte de visite*, entitled *Emancipation*, personifies the nation as a white woman who wraps an immense flag around two kneeling slaves.

7 *Carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth with a photograph of her grandson on her lap, 1863

On July 4, 1863, in the *National Anti-Slavery Standard*, Truth announced her grandson's enlistment in the famous 54th Massachusetts Regiment, the first all-black volunteer infantry. "Her faith is strong that God's hand is in this war, and that it will end in the destruction of slavery, which day she hopes to live to see. The enlisting of the colored people she considers the most hopeful feature of the war."

Truth was very proud of her grandson James Caldwell, whom she described as "a tall, able-bodied lad" determined to redeem white people from God's curse and to save the nation. Truth also expressed her frustration that she herself could not lead "the colored troops"; instead she "can only send you her shadow." Even at this early date, Sojourner Truth conceived of her "shadows" as the means to raise money. The article ends: "We are sure that many of our readers will thank us for informing them that Sojourner will send her photograph by mail to any one who will write her enclosing 50 cents and a 3-cent stamp. Letters to be directed to Battle Creek, Michigan."

8 Thomas Nast (United States, born Germany, 1840–1902): captioned *carte de visite* (The Colored Volunteer), 1863

9 *Carte de visite* of John Sharper, 1863

According to government archives, by the end of the Civil War some 179,000 black men had served in the US Army (constituting 10% of the Union Army) and 19,000 had served in the US Navy. 40,000 died during the war, often from infection and disease.

When Sojourner Truth made the photograph in which she displays a framed portrait of her grandson, who had just joined the first all-black regiment, she offered an alternative to images, such as Nast's, that mocked and emasculated the black men and boys who fought to end slavery. Photographic portraits made counterarguments, showing us alert and serious black men, even boys, who were determined to fix their likenesses as soldiers willing to lose their lives to win the war against slavery.

**SOJOURNER TRUTH'S
CAPTIONED AND COPYRIGHTED
CARTES DE VISITE**

10 Captioned *carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth, 1864

11 Captioned *carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth, c. 1864–66

The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

12 Captioned *carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth, c. 1864–65

On backs: "Entered according to the Act of Congress in the year 1864 by Sojourner Truth, In the Clerk's Office of the U.S. District Court, for the Eastern District of Mich."

Handwritten on back of no. 12: "An ex-slave entertained by Uncle & Aunt Campbell."

13 Thomas Nast (United States, born Germany, 1840–1902):
A Shadow Is Not a Substance, 1876

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

In 1864 Truth began to inscribe her *cartes de visite* with a caption, her name, and a copyright: “I Sell the Shadow to Support the Substance. SOJOURNER TRUTH.” Truth’s use of the first-person present tense “I sell” declares her ownership of her image: to sell it, she must own it. Most significantly, by using this caption Sojourner Truth knowingly aligned her photographs with paper money.

Sojourner Truth’s very terms, “substance” and “shadow,” were economic as well as photographic metaphors in the fierce debates about money: shadow was aligned with the abolition of slavery, substance with proslavery and anti-black sentiment. Sojourner Truth knew this opposition very well. She was making cheap paper notes, printed and reproduced in multiples, featuring her portrait. She had invented her own kind of paper currency, and for the same reasons as the government: in order to produce wealth dependent on a consensus that representation produces material results, to make money where there was none, and to do so partly in order to abolish slavery.

The photographs of Sojourner Truth register only her appearance, not her commanding presence. They are shadows, and some are more elusive and mute than others. Yet the printed words—name, caption, and copyright—remain forthright: her speech, authorship, and recourse to law coexist with her image. Those printed words force us to acknowledge the illiterate woman’s authorship, as well as her eloquence, her agency, and her legal claim to property, even as we value these humble objects.

No. 10 is one of two known *cartes de visite* of Sojourner Truth that bear not only the caption, name, and copyright, but also a tax stamp that dates the photograph to 1864. Tax stamps were created to raise money for the Union cause, although they were attached to only a very small percentage of purchased photographs.

14 Captioned *carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth, 1864

In all her seated portraits, Truth carefully chose the items she held in her lap: initially, the photograph of her heroic missing grandson and thereafter, her knitting. We must take her choices seriously. During the Civil War knitting acquired new patriotic connotations. No longer merely a feminine domestic art, knitting had become a public duty; newspapers published pleas for sewing and knitting societies to devote themselves to serving the cause.

During the Civil War, Truth was determined to teach her skills to the emancipated slaves, often Southern field hands, living in Freedmen’s Villages. A Union officer reported that Truth would say, “Be clean, be clean, for cleanliness is a part of godliness.” He paraphrased Truth’s beliefs:

“[T]hey must learn to be independent—learn industry and economy—and above all strive to show people that they could be something. She urged them to embrace for their children all opportunities of education and advancement. In fact, she talked to them as a white person could not, for they would have been offended with such plain truths from any other source [. . .] She goes into their cabins with her knitting in her hand, and while she talks with them she knits. Few of them know how to knit, and but few know how to make a loaf of bread, or anything of the kind. She wants to teach the old people how to knit, for they have no employment, and they will be much happier if usefully employed.”

Truth associated knitting with industry and advancement, not gentility. With real savvy, she informally introduced the craft to freed slaves by demonstrating the skill, not just telling her audience to learn it. The many *cartes de visite* that feature her knitting sustain this demonstration.

15 **Captioned *carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth, 1864**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

Handwritten on back: Bought by Ann Heald, West Branch, Iowa 1870 at the lecture by Sojourner Truth. Ann Heald was a member of a Quaker community that supported the Underground Railroad. She was twenty-eight years old when she heard Truth and purchased a *carte de visite*. The *carte de visite* of Truth was placed at the very end of a Heald family photograph album dating from the 1860s. Truth was the only non-family member represented in the album, indicating the extent to which the Healds identified with the abolitionist cause that she represented.

16 **Captioned *carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth, c. 1882**

On November 26, 1883, six weeks after the Supreme Court had overturned the Civil Rights Act, betraying the black women and men and children who had fought to end slavery, Sojourner Truth died at her home in Battle Creek. Among her very last portraits is this *carte de visite*, which still bears her caption and copyright but, unlike previous photographs, prominently features her face. Here we see a woman without glasses who looks older and more fragile, perhaps tired. In fact, Truth continued to travel extensively throughout the late 1870s and early 1880s despite her old age and her infirmities.

Truth's very last speech occurred on June 8, 1881, at the Michigan State Legislature in Lansing where she denounced a bill to institute capital punishment. The Wykoff Hanging Bill was defeated and Truth's conciliatory speech was published in a Battle Creek newspaper: "He who sanctions the crime of hanging will have to answer for it. I believe that God has spared me to do good to this white population, which has done so much good to the black race. How wonderful God turns things."

Truth's last speech casts too positive a light on black-white relations in post-Reconstruction America. In fact, the "white population" was failing the "black race." On October 15, 1883, the year of

Truth's death, the Supreme Court declared unconstitutional the tepid Civil Rights Act of 1875. This court decision ushered in the widespread segregation of blacks in housing, employment, and public life that historian Douglas Blockman has called "slavery by another name." The court's sanction of segregation would only be overturned some eighty years later by the legislation hard won by the Civil Rights Movement of the 1960s.

17 **Family album of *cartes de visite* by Mrs. Tuckerman, 1865-1870s; albumen prints in leather-bound album**

This *carte de visite* album, manufactured in Boston, Massachusetts, was compiled by a Mrs. Tuckerman, who placed the *carte de visite* of Truth in her family album's first pages. Five family albums have been located that include a *carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth. They were compiled in Iowa, Ohio, Massachusetts, Michigan or New York, and perhaps Rhode Island. All of these families were white and pro-Union; several were Quaker; two were active in the Underground Railroad. Albums, like collections more generally, were seen as political by creators and viewers alike.

18 ***Carte de visite* of a woman holding album of *cartes de visite*, c. 1864-66**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

19 **Back of *carte de visite* showing photographer's imprint of a photo album, c. 1864-66; ink on cardboard**

20 ***Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence, Drawn from Her "Book of Life," 1850/1875***

The Bancroft Library, University of California, Berkeley

Like other former slaves such as Frederick Douglass, Sojourner Truth wrote a narrative of her life. Unable to read or write, she did so with the help of two women friends and paid on credit for the book's first printing in 1850. She later recovered the plates and reissued the book in three further editions, in 1875, 1878, and 1881. The last, posthumous edition of 1884 added to the title: *Also, A Memorial Chapter, Giving the Particulars of Her Last Illness and Death.*

The portrait on the title page of Sojourner Truth's *Narrative* was based on one of her *cartes de visite*.

- 21 *Carte de visite* of Frederick Douglass, c. 1879; George Kendall Warren, photographer

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

Frederick Douglass was also a runaway slave and eloquent abolitionist. Douglass and Truth both believed in the liberatory power of modernization and both were confident that the new medium of photography would contribute to their society's redefinition of the status of black men and women. Of all modern inventions, photography, Douglass argued, would have the most far-reaching impact. He devoted two public lectures to photography, in 1861 and 1865, arguing that self-possession requires recognition from others. Douglass had 160 portraits made between 1841 and 1895. Like most sitters and unlike Truth, Douglass allowed the photographer's name to be printed at the bottom of this *carte de visite* instead of his own.

CIVIL WAR DEBATES ABOUT MONEY

- 22 Captioned *carte de visite* (A Nest of Copperheads), c. 1864
- 23 Thomas Nast (United States, born Germany, 1840–1902): *Milk Tickets for Babies in Place of Milk*, 1876

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

During the Civil War, a ferocious debate raged about whether paper could represent value like coin. Paper greenbacks—the first federally issued banknotes in American history—were attacked by those who believed that money was not a representation but a “substance.” Hard money advocates (naïvely) believed that gold was value, not its representation. Thomas Nast's illustration to David Wells's famous anti-greenback tract of 1876, *Robinson Crusoe's Money; or, The Remarkable Fortunes and Misfortunes of a Remote Island Community*, parodies the government's assertion that paper was substance. No matter what Congress declared, paper is *not* milk or a cow or a house. And paper is *not*

money. Invented to win the Civil War, paper currency was Republican and abolitionist; coin was upheld by those in the North and the South—called “copperheads”—who opposed the war and supported slavery.

Attacks on greenbacks took many forms. In New York City a singer in blackface parodied a popular recruiting song authored by a well-known Quaker and abolitionist: “We're Coming, Father Abram, one hundred thousand more/Five hundred presses printing us from morn till night is o'er/Like magic, you will see us start and scatter thro' the land/To pay the soldiers or release the border contraband.”

A proslavery Southerner reported that Baltimore women clandestinely wearing copper-cent brooches were arrested by Federal agents. In the South, by contrast, “colored” women were collecting photographs, probably for their exchange value. And prisoners were shrewd enough to pretend that a photographed lady, perhaps a family member, was Queen Victoria. Only public figures would be worth something. Like paper bills, *cartes de visite* functioned during these years as currency and as clandestine political tokens.

- 24 Fifty-cent fractional currency note (also called postage currency note and “greenback”) representing five ten-cent postage stamps with a portrait of George Washington, 1862; ink on paper
- 25 Back of ten-cent fractional currency note (also called postage currency note and “greenback”), 1863; ink on paper
- 26–27 Two portraits with tax stamps featuring a portrait of George Washington on the back, 1864; tintypes (front and back)
- 28 Back of *carte de visite* with two-cent tax stamp, 1864–66; postage stamp on printed cardboard

When the US government first replaced coin with paper greenbacks during the Civil War, it relied on the precedent of federally issued postal stamps. The first national banknotes, called “fractional currency” because the bills were worth only a fraction of a dollar, were

indebted to the precedent of federal postage and made that association explicit by placing images of postal stamps at the center of the notes' engravings. Thus familiar and revered faces were centrally framed in the new fractional bills for three or five cents.

The term "greenbacks" derived from the green backs on many but not all federally issued notes. In 1863, a newspaper editor identified the recruitment of black soldiers with the creation of paper money, both of which he opposed: "For finance, issue Greenbacks, for war, Blackbacks."

- 29 One-dollar bill with portrait of Salmon P. Chase, 1862; ink on paper
- 30 Five-cent fractional currency note with portrait of Spencer Clark, superintendent of the National Currency Bureau, 1865; ink on paper

When serving as Secretary of the Treasury and campaigning for the presidency in the 1864 election, Salmon Chase controversially chose to put his face on the ubiquitous one-dollar greenback while placing Lincoln's face on the far rarer ten-dollar bill. He was using the paper money he printed as a form of political advertising.

An even bigger scandal erupted when Spencer Morton Clark, first chief of the National Currency Bureau, decided to place his own portrait on the five-cent note in 1863. Clark was a low-level bureaucrat who overstepped his authority and drew attention to the embarrassing question of portraits on treasury notes.

The most significant outcome of the Treasury debacle was Congress's prohibition in 1866 of the placement of a portrait of any living person on US currency, a law still in effect today.

- 31 Five-cent fractional currency note with "bronzing" around the image of George Washington, 1863; ink and bronze on paper
- 32 Twenty-five-cent fractional currency note with off-center "bronzing" around the image of George Washington, 1863; ink and bronze on paper

Anxieties about counterfeiting immediately followed the manufacture of the first greenbacks. Quickly, designs and printing methods were invented to thwart counterfeiters. The very first fractional bills of 1863 featured a bronze oval encircling the portrait face—as if paper money needed to recall the precious metal coin, the substance, it had sacrificed and turned into an image.

Significantly, photography, that strange process whereby valuable metals were turned into paper, had compelled this ghosting of coin: the bronzing technique was devised to prevent the photographic counterfeiting of paper money. Because a photograph is sensitive only to tone, it could not produce a negative capable of distinguishing the brown (and reflective) metallic circle from the engraved lines that lay beneath it. Criminals were over-confident about photography's reproductive capacity; the federal government rightly believed it could outwit the medium.

Paper money was designed to prevent unauthorized duplication. Not so photographs, even after their copyright was made into law in 1865. In 1860 Lincoln had accepted the infinite reproduction of his shadow ("I have not a single one now at my control; . . . I suppose they got my shadow and can multiply copies indefinitely"), but he attempted two years later to exert control over the printing of federal banknotes.

- 33 *Carte de visite* of a twenty-dollar bill, c. 1864

- 34 Captioned *carte de visite* (The Northern Star), c. 1864

On front: "The Polar Star by which we steer/A Friend in need and ever dear/"Tis money that makes the mare to go/And Chase the money makes you know."

- 35 Captioned *carte de visite* (The Southern Cross) c. 1864
Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

On front: "Hard to Carry and on the wane/The Rebels of their Change Complain/But when they come to meet their bills/They'll find their change the least of ills."

During the Civil War, the printing press itself came to stand for the Republican cause. The printing of money was even represented in a number of *cartes de visite*. Rightly paranoid that his paper reproduction could be mistaken for a counterfeit bill despite its smaller size, the printer of the “Twenty-Dollar Bill” fills the card’s back with text establishing its credentials as an authorized—and copyrighted—“souvenir.”

In *The Northern Star*, four photographically reproduced, wrinkled one-dollar bills and one two-dollar bill rotate around the mirroring heads of Salmon Chase—Secretary of the Treasury, Republican, and abolitionist—and Abraham Lincoln. Between the two men’s heads at the center of the card is a barely comprehensible poem that ends with the line: “And Chase the money makes you know.” In the spatial configuration of the image, Chase is the Northern Star, the moneymaker, yet the inverse is true as well: the money makes you know Chase. Each one-dollar bill spinning around the central axis features his profile portrait. By contrast *The Southern Cross* mocks the Confederacy for its lack of “change” to “meet their bills.”

Sojourner Truth was making a form of paper currency and her cheap paper notes, printed and reproduced in multiples, featured her portrait. This was no insignificant achievement. Like Chase she had put her face on paper that stood for economic value; like Chase she was publicizing her self and her politics with her portrait. Truth had invented her own kind of paper money and for the same reasons as the Republican government: in order to produce wealth dependent on a consensus that representation produces material results, to make money where there was none, and to do so partly in order to abolish slavery.

PHOTOGRAPHY AS SHADOW, PHOTOGRAPHY AS CHEMISTRY

36 *Carte de visite* of a silhouette of a man, c. 1864–66

A Civil War *carte de visite* featuring a silhouette combines the earlier convention of inexpensive paper cutout portraits with the newer albumen print pasted to a cardboard mount, in this case preprinted with an ornate frame. The object at once draws our attention to the continuity between an earlier, rudimentary form of portraiture and its photographic counterpart, but also to the fundamental difference between the shadow conceived as a silhouette and the shadow conceived as a photograph. The silhouette offers a precise shape whose outer contours map the profile of the sitter, but within that delineated shape all information is withheld. Inside the contour there are no distinctions, and the blackness conceals relations among parts.

37 Portrait of a woman, late 19th century; glass negative (for cabinet card)

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

38 Captioned *carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth, 1864; black-and-white negative (facsimile)

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

According to the great nineteenth-century poet, essayist, and thinker about photography, Oliver Wendell Holmes, photographic negatives turn the world upside down. The (pictorial) truth is restored when white is finally once again white, and dark is once again dark (after a temporary confusing inversion). To avoid the unpleasantness of racial disorientation in the making of a photograph, Hermann Vogel, author of *The Chemistry of Light and Photography in Their Application to Art, Science and Industry* (1875), recommended that sitters not be allowed to see the negatives of their portraits because, “however interesting . . . a negative could be, it could not satisfy the purchaser of a portrait because it showed everything reversed. . . . No one would hang up on his wall a picture representing him as a Moor.” Underlying all these arguments was a commitment to the preservation of racial difference, especially whiteness.

39 Portrait of a man, c. 1870s; tintype (damaged)

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

Tintypes have layers of varnish added to them; this one apparently lost the top layer somehow, perhaps because it had not been applied properly. As a result, the image changed chemically over time.

While photographs could be called shadows in the nineteenth century, they were actually the result of complex chemical processes that were often unstable. The overall chemical reaction entails a leveling of registered information; compromises and losses are built into its procedures as well as its results. One must decide what to lose and what to preserve. Appearance is also entirely variable according to conditions of lighting. For all these reasons, tonal values in photography rarely satisfied those hoping to “fix” racial difference: sitters continually complained that photographs made them appear too dark or too light or too unlike other sitters in the picture. In photography skin color is subject to different lighting conditions, exposures, and chemical processes, all of which confuse the opposition of black and white so fundamental to our ideas about both photography and race in the United States. Correctly photographing a dark person’s face entails a loss of information about the light areas elsewhere. And of course the inverse also holds true: exposing for a light-skinned person entails loss of detail throughout dark areas.

CARTES DE VISITE AS POLITICAL WEAPONS

40 Anti-Union *carte de visite* of Abraham Lincoln in blackface, c. 1861–65; B. H. Benham, photographer

Here Abraham Lincoln’s face has been painted brown, travestied by blackface. The photographer, B. H. Benham, had a studio in Norwalk, Ohio, a hotbed for copperhead beliefs, so it is possible that he was an anti-Lincoln Democrat.

41 Anti-Confederate *carte de visite* with satyr-devil hanging Jefferson Davis from a noose topped by a seven-star Confederate flag from 1861 (dangling

from his pitchfork are six portraits of Confederate Generals Davis, Stephens, Lee, Stonewall, Beauregard, and Price), 1865; F. Gutekunst, photographer

The majority of anti-Confederate *cartes de visite* featured the Confederate leader Jefferson Davis. This example, probably dating to 1865, celebrates the Northern defeat of the South by hanging a row of *carte de visite* portraits of Confederate generals from a pitchfork held by a rakish, sculpted satyr-devil. From his other hand, the winged devil dangles a miniature figure of Jefferson Davis lynched beneath a Confederate flag. Davis’s photographed head was frequently cut out of *cartes de visite* and pasted onto drawings, prints, and other photographs, then rephotographed and made into new *cartes de visite*. Such pictures are important reminders that having one’s portrait taken in this medium risked entering the fray of public debate. In the midst of war, opponents could slap together insulting collages.

42 Anti-Confederate *carte de visite* caricaturing Jefferson Davis, 1865; Wenderoth & Taylor, photographer

43 Anti-Confederate *carte de visite* caricaturing Jefferson Davis, 1865

44 Anti-Confederate *carte de visite* caricaturing Jefferson Davis, 1865

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

On back: “jeff davis. Himself”

45 Anti-Confederate *carte de visite* of Jefferson Davis attempting to escape the Union Army, May 10, 1865, c. 1865

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

46 Anti-Confederate *carte de visite* caricaturing Jefferson Davis (Now therefore I, Jefferson Davis, President of the Confederate States of America—all I want is to be let alone!), 1865; Day & Dean, photographer

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

Especially popular were *cartes de visite* showing Jefferson Davis’s attempt to escape the Union army on May 10, 1865, purportedly by disguising himself as a woman (Davis claimed that he was simply wearing his wife’s shawl for warmth).

CARTES DE VISITE AS UNION AND ABOLITIONIST FUNDRAISERS

47 *Carte de visite* (Donation Cake), c. 1865

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

Little is known about this Civil War *carte de visite* except that it commemorates fundraising, a bake sale from one hundred and fifty years ago.

48 *Carte de visite* of amputee on chair, late 19th century

49 *Carte de visite* of amputee on cart, late 19th century

50a–b *Carte de visite* of Benjamin Franklin, veteran amputee (front shown with facsimile of back), 1865; Bailey & Magraw, photographer

On back: “Benjamin Franklin, the unfortunate soldier, who lost all his limbs by freezing, while crossing the plains from Fort Wadsworth, Dakota Territory Fort Ridgely, Minn. . . . He was out eight days and seven nights without food or fire, when found by two Indians was nearly starved to death. He is the only Soldier in the United States without hands and feet, and is trying to sell his Photographs for the benefit of his family. Price, 25 Cents.”

During the Civil War, in the years before the official addition of photography to copyright law, the *cartes de visite* that most consistently featured copyrights were intended to raise funds on behalf of causes, such as the welfare of amputees, orphans, or emancipated slaves. Because such cards were intended to raise money, publishers insisted that they should not be copied by others. The many *cartes de visite* of amputees were likely sold for the benefit of their families, as the text on the back of Benjamin Franklin’s photograph states.

51 *Carte de visite* of Frank, Frederick, and Alice, c. 1865

52 Captioned *carte de visite* of Frank, Frederick, and Alice, 1865

On back: “The CHILDREN OF THE BATTLE FIELD. This is a copy of the Ferrottype found in the hands of Sergeant Humiston of the 154th N.Y. Volunteers as he lay dead on the Battle

Field of Gettysburg. *The copies are sold in furtherance of the National Sabbath School effort to found in Pennsylvania an Asylum for dependent Orphans of Soldiers; in memorial of our Perpetuated Union.* Wenderoth, Taylor & Brown, 912-914 Chestnut Street, Philadelphia. *This picture is private property, and can not be copied without wronging the Soldier’s Orphans for whom it is published.* Philadelphia, Sept. 23, 1865. J. Frances Bourns.

As the text on the back of this card makes clear, this portrait of beloved offspring had initially been found without names on the body of an unidentified fallen soldier. The photograph was reproduced and circulated as a *carte de visite* in order to determine the soldier’s identity. This early form of mass communication ultimately worked and his family was found. Subsequently, new *cartes de visite* included the children’s names, Frank, Frederick, and Alice, and were circulated in order to raise money on behalf of a school for orphans.

53 Captioned *carte de visite* of Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence, 1863

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

54 Captioned *carte de visite* of Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence, 1863; J. W. Black, photographer

55 Captioned *carte de visite* of Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence, 1863; J. W. Black, photographer

Several extensive series of *cartes de visite* were made of rescued slave children, especially those who appeared to be white like this child, Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence.

In the *cartes de visite* of the “redeemed slave child” Fannie Virginia Casseopia Lawrence, captions make claims to possession of the child and her portrait, claims problematically resembling slavery. If Sojourner Truth boldly filed a copyright in her own name, the 1863 copyright on these photographs is in the name of the child’s “redeemer,” Catherine S. Lawrence, who gave the fair-skinned little girl her surname (and also had her baptized by Harriet Beecher Stowe’s brother, Henry Ward Beecher). Catherine Lawrence had Fannie photographed at least a dozen times in a wide range of costumes and

settings. Although most *cartes* show her lavishly dressed, one unusual example shows the little girl barefoot, as if in transition from her status as poor slave to affluent and “passing” adoptee. Like the word “redeem” itself, this *carte de visite* combines Christian, economic, and legal claims. Its extremely unusual copyright betrays the financial transaction that redefined the “redeemed” slave child as adoptee.

- 56 Captioned *carte de visite* (Our Protection. Rosa, Charley, and Rebecca. Slave Children from New Orleans), c. 1864; Charles Paxson, photographer
- 57 Captioned *carte de visite* (Oh! How I love the old flag. Rebecca, A Slave Girl from New Orleans), c. 1864; Charles Paxson, photographer
- 58 Captioned *carte de visite* of Rebecca, A Slave Girl from New Orleans, c. 1864; Charles Paxson, photographer
- 59 Captioned *carte de visite* of Rebecca, Charley, and Rosa, Slave Children from New Orleans, c. 1864; Kimball, photographer
- 60 Captioned *carte de visite* (White and Black Slaves from New Orleans), c. 1864
- 61 Captioned *carte de visite* of Isaac and Rosa, Emancipated Slave Children from the Free Schools of Louisiana, c. 1863

Courtesy of Gregoria Grigsby-Olson

An even more extensive series of *cartes de visite* was made of the light-skinned slave orphans Rebecca, Rosa, and Charley, who were rescued in New Orleans. Isaac was the sole child in this series with dark skin, and he was seldom depicted. (Even more rarely, black adults who also had been slaves accompany the children.) The series was sold to raise money for “the education of colored people.”

Pale and neatly dressed, Rebecca, Rosa, and Charley were repeatedly photographed in order to shock Northern viewers with the specter of the wrongful enslavement of white children: “How wrong! Lovely white children, not just blacks, are being enslaved in the south!” Two of these *cartes* wrap the

children in an immense flag, just as Sojourner had been wrapped in patriotic clothing in her earliest *carte de visite* (no. 5). The children are models doing the job that the photographer has required of them, and the flag itself is an awkward prop hauled out from a corner of the studio and draped over the obedient children.

The back of this *carte* and others depicting these children claim that proceeds from its sale “will be devoted to the education of Colored People in the department of the Gulf, under the command of Maj. Gen’l Banks.”

- 62 Captioned *carte de visite* (Learning is Wealth. Wilson, Charley, Rebecca & Rosa, Slaves from New Orleans), 1864
Courtesy of Pierre Grigsby-Olson

- 63 Captioned *carte de visite* (back)
Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

The text on the back of this *carte de visite* is identical to that on the back of the *cartes* in the Learning Is Wealth series.

- 64 Captioned *carte de visite* (Learning is Wealth. Wilson, Charley, Rebecca & Rosa, Slaves from New Orleans), 1864; Chas. Paxson, photographer
Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

- 65 Captioned *carte de visite* (Lerning [sic] is Wealth. Wilson, Charley, Rebecca & Rosa, Slaves from New Orleans), 1864

Part of the fundraising series devoted to the freed slaves of New Orleans, this *carte de visite* poses the formerly enslaved adult Wilson Chinn reading to Charley, Rebecca, and Rosa, freed children. Especially poignant is another paler, most likely later version, in which the caption is misspelled as ‘Lerning is Wealth’. Wealth, the caption proposes, derives from literacy, not slavery.

Other *cartes de visite* of Wilson Chinn emphasize his abuse under slavery, displaying menacing chains at his feet and branded letters on his forehead, his former owner’s initials: “V. B. M.” The letters on Chinn’s forehead turn him into surface on which is inscribed the literacy of others. In this *carte* Wilson’s head is turned so we do not see that the man who reads from a book is likewise inscribed as a text; none of the children look to the alternative printing on his forehead.

**66 Knowledge Is Power, c. 1870s;
black-and-white photograph**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

In a photograph of the 1870s, a black teacher points to the phrase that she has written on a chalkboard: “Knowledge is power. Miss E. E. Elliott, Teacher.” Miss Elliott is here modifying the caption from the “Learning Is Wealth” *cartes de visite*, shifting the emphasis from the economic to the political— education produces not wealth but power.

AFRICAN AMERICAN PORTRAITURE

Portraits can socially elevate but painted portraits were not affordable for the majority of Americans. Nineteenth-century photography, especially *cartes de visite* and tintypes, brought portraiture within the reach of many more people. African Americans seized the opportunity to have their “likeness” made. Tintypes also made it possible to adorn sitters with precious gold jewelry applied as strokes of paint. Glistening paint ornamented sitters with sparkling accessories—gold rings, necklaces, buttons, military belt buckles—and fancy ornamental enclosures framed persons as worthy.

**67 Portrait of a woman with gold jewelry
(three rings, pendant necklace,
earrings) painted onto the image,
c. 1860s; tintype with gold paint**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**68 Portrait of a man, seated with legs
crossed, c. 1860s; tintype**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**69 Portrait of a woman wearing a
necklace, late 19th century; ambrotype**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**70 Portrait of a man, seated and wearing
a hat, late 19th century; tintype**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**71 Portrait of a man, late 19th century;
tintype**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**72 Portrait of a man, late 19th century;
tintype**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**73 Portrait of a woman, late 19th century;
tintype framed as a *carte de visite***

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**74 Portrait of a man (Pompei), late 19th
century; tintype framed as a *carte de
visite***

**75 *Carte de visite* of a girl standing next to a
draped table with folded fan, c. 1860s;
Bruce & Hall, photographer**

**76 *Carte de visite* of a woman, c. 1860s;
G. L. Bayha, photographer**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**77 *Carte de visite* of a man, c. 1860s;
N. B. Baker, photographer**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**78 *Carte de visite* of two girls, one white
and one black, c. 1860s**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**79 Portrait of a woman, seated with
teacup, late 19th century; albumen
print**

**80 Portrait of a young man, seated,
c. 1870s; tintype**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

**AUTOGRAPHS, PAPER,
AND CIVIL WAR**

**81a–b Captioned *carte de visite*
(Autograph Letter. President Lincoln
to John Hanks), c. 1860s (front shown
with facsimile of back)**

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

On back: “Autograph Letter. President Lincoln to John Hanks. John Hanks has now in his possession an interesting relic of our late Chief Magistrate,—a letter addressed to him by Mr. Lincoln after his election as President. In this letter the writer informs Uncle John that he is going to Coles’ on a certain day, (to visit his father’s grave) and asks his old associate and friend to join him at Decatur. The friendship of these two men, whose fortunes in life were so widely different, remained unabated; and Uncle John, who had slept with Lincoln the rail-splitter in a log-cabin years ago, was permitted to enjoy full

social intercourse with Lincoln the statesman and ruler in the White House. Sidney Herbert. Author of "The Mother of Lincoln."

82a–c Autographs of Distinguished Persons (facsimiles), 1875; From *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence, Drawn from Her "Book of Life"*

83 Autograph album

Courtesy of Darcy Grimaldo Grigsby

Despite her illiteracy, despite her lack of a signature of her own, Truth was an avid collector of autographs. Truth collected the autographs of the many important activists, politicians, and thinkers with whom she was acquainted, asking them to write their names in her scrapbooks; sometimes they added a phrase or two. Her impulse to collect signatures was shared by many of her contemporaries.

A Boston newspaper noted: "She carries with her three small books in which she has inscribed the autographs of nearly all the eminent people in America." Her collection is therefore an index of her intimate relation with the men and women who were making history. Like her *Narrative*, her autograph collection comprises a form of autobiography.

Truth collected the autograph, ultimate emblem of the uniqueness of handwriting, only to imagine turning it into a mechanically reproduced publication. How odd, given autographs were valued as indexical signs of the individual, registrations of the hand's unique actions applying pen to paper. Authentic autographs had begun to accrue value in the 1850s but the nineteenth century nonetheless witnessed their repeated mechanical reproduction.

84 *Narrative of Sojourner Truth; A Bondswoman of Olden Time, Emancipated by the New York Legislature in the Early Part of the Present Century; with a History of Her Labors and Correspondence, Drawn from Her "Book of Life," 1875*

Sojourner Truth believed in paper and words: the paper currency created by the Federal government to support the war; the newspapers in which she had her letters published; the *cartes de visite* that she sold to support herself, labeled and copyrighted; the stamps that could send her paper photographs across the country to supporters; the tax stamps that the government required again to raise funds on behalf of the Union cause.

Unusually, the front cover of Sojourner Truth's autobiography represents Truth in a gold imprint that better resembles coin than paper currency. Of course, the old portrait is only an embossed and engraved surface, not a coin. And the back of her book underscores how illusory its resemblance to precious metal is. On the back appears the same imprinted oval with her figure, but it has been left startlingly empty. No gold ink fills the emptied grooves. Instead, we see an empty imprint of the front cover's portrait, a silhouette. Not mimesis but absence as shape. Take away the gold, and representation—even an emptied outline—still has value. Truth understood this.



Sojourner Truth, Photography, and the Fight Against Slavery
UC BERKELEY ART MUSEUM AND PACIFIC FILM ARCHIVE
July 27–October 23, 2016

Front Cover: *Carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth with a photograph of her grandson on her lap, 1863 (no. 7)

Inside Front Cover: Captioned *carte de visite* of Sojourner Truth, 1864 (no. 14)

Back Cover: *Knowledge Is Power*, c. 1870s (no. 66)

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