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Art, Artifact, Archive: African American Experiences in the Nineteenth Century

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Art, Artifact, Archive: African American Experiences in the Nineteenth Century

Description

Angelo Scarlato's extraordinary and vast collection of art and artifacts related to the Civil War, and specifically to the Battle of Gettysburg, the United States Colored Troops, slavery and the African American struggle for emancipation, citizenship and freedom has proved to be an extraordinary resource for Gettysburg College students. The 2012-14 exhibition in Musselman Library's Special Collections, curated by Lauren Roedner '13, entitled *Slaves, Soldiers, Citizens: African American Artifacts of the Civil War Era* and its corresponding catalogue provided a powerful and comprehensive historical narrative of the period.

This fall, students in my course at Gettysburg College "Art and Public Policy"—Diane Brennan, Maura Conley, Abigail Conner, Nicole Conte, Victoria Perez-Zetune, Savannah Rose, Kaylyn Sawyer, Caroline Wood and Zoe Yeoh—selected additional objects of material and print culture from Angelo's private collection and drew from Lauren's expertise for the exhibition *Art, Artifact, Archive: African American Experiences in the Nineteenth Century* to investigate public representations of a newly freed population as well as their more personal perspectives. [*excerpt*]

Keywords

Civil War, Battle of Gettysburg, United States Colored Troops, USCT, African American, black soldier, Gettysburg College, emancipation, freedom, citizenship, artifact, exhibit, Harper's Weekly, Frederick Douglass, slavery, daguerreotype

Disciplines

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Comments

Art, Artifact, Archive: African American Experiences in the Nineteenth Century is on exhibition at the Schmucker Art Gallery at Gettysburg College, January 23 - March 7, 2015.

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ART, ARTIFACT, ARCHIVE:
African-American Experiences in the Nineteenth Century

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This fall, students in my course at Gettysburg College "Art and Public Policy"—Diane Brennan, Maura Conley, Abigail Conner, Nicole Conte, Victoria Perez-Zetune, Savannah Rose, Kaylyn Sawyer, Caroline Wood and Zoe Yeoh—selected additional objects of material and print culture from Angelo's private collection and drew from Lauren's expertise for the exhibition *Art, Artifact, Archive: African American Experiences in the Nineteenth Century* to investigate public representations of a newly freed population as well as their more personal perspectives. Specific objects on display, such as illustrations reproduced in *Harper's Weekly* stand on the side of emancipation and franchise, while others, such as print blocks depicting slave collars, convey the horrors of this dehumanizing practice. The photographs in the exhibition—early Daguerreotypes of slaves as well as late-nineteenth-century dignified and beautiful portraits—reveal complicated realities unknown to the *Harper's* artists. By looking at varied representations both of and by African Americans through the nineteenth century, the students consider how an object eludes clear definition as art, artifact or archive.

The exhibition provides historical context for each object and invites sustained discussion about the perspective of the people represented. While no single exhibition can convey the breadth of the varying experiences of African Americans during the nineteenth century, the student curators intend to broaden the viewers' understanding of political, racial and visual culture.

This exhibition would not be possible without Angelo Scarlato's generous loan of this material, and I am thankful that Angelo shared his profound and impassioned knowledge of nineteenth-century history with the "Art and Public Policy" students. The students benefited from Lauren Roedner's thorough research and skillful editing of their essays, and I am delighted that she has contributed an essay to this catalogue. Many special thanks are due to Carolyn Sautter, Director of Special Collections and College Archives, and her staff in Special Collections, Catherine Perry, Digital Projects Coordinator and Collections Manager, and Amy Lucadamo, Archivist, for their help in facilitating myriad aspects of the exhibition—from loan forms and images to immense support of the students' research and handling of the objects. Additional thanks are due to Ayumi Yasuda for her consistently outstanding graphic design. This exhibition is supported in part by the John and Marie Zimmermann Fund, and I appreciate the assistance of Ken Goody '80 for making this gift possible. The students—Diane, Maura, Abigail, Nicole, Victoria, Savannah, Kaylyn, Caroline and Zoe—deserve special commendation for their diligent research and efforts at writing about difficult and complicated subjects. Finally, I am especially grateful to Molly Reynolds; her work for both Special Collections and Schmucker Art Gallery is truly invaluable.

— Shannon Egan, Ph.D.
Director, Schmucker Art Gallery

DIANE BRENNAN



FREDERICK DOUGLASS
CORNELIUS M. BATTEY (1873-1927)

Silver print

42 x 35 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato

This photograph of abolitionist Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), taken by Cornelius M. Battey (1873-1927), has been reproduced widely; for example, in Frederic May Holland's biography, *Frederick Douglass: The Colored Orator*, and as postcards. Born into slavery on the Eastern Shore of Maryland, Douglass became one of the nation's most prominent orators, advising presidents and lecturing on many causes including slavery, women's rights, and Irish home rule. Douglass' autobiographies articulately describe his experiences in slavery and his life after the Civil War. Despite hesitations that the information might endanger his freedom, Douglass published his first autobiography, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, an American Slave* in 1845. Douglass received one vote to be nominated as the first black United States presidential candidate, during the National Liberty Party Convention, June 14-15, 1848 in Buffalo, NY.

As the photographer of this famous Douglass image, Battey was born in Augusta, GA in 1873 and was an active African American photographer throughout the North. He photographed prominent African Americans, including W.E.B. DuBois in a series titled *Our Master Minds*, and produced *Five Negro Immortals*, a composition that comprised photographs of Booker T. Washington, Frederick Douglass, John M. Langston, B. K. Bruce, and Paul Laurence Dunbar. In 1916, he became the director of the Photography Division at Tuskegee Institute in Alabama.

MAURA CONLEY

These carved wooden printing blocks were created in the early nineteenth century, well before the beginning of the American Civil War.¹ Slave advertising around this time was prevalent in newspapers, and the original purpose of these blocks was likely to advertise for the slave collars that they depict. Writings that accompany a print of these blocks from 1810 describe the use of the collar that is depicted from each angle. The protruding stakes were meant to get caught on branches and deter a slave from running through the woods to freedom, and the headpieces, such as the one depicted, prohibited the slave from resting their heads to sleep or take a break.² These horrifying devices were used in the United States and also widely in Brazil, France, and a few other European countries. Accounts of headpieces used in Brazil describe how the devices prevent dirt eating, once thought to be an attempt at suicide, but now assumed to be related to the slaves' nutrient deficiency.³ Many slave collars in the U.S. and elsewhere did not have any headpiece at all. The collar alone marks the slave as a target, hinders and prevents rest, greatly decreases the likelihood of a successful escape, and clearly marks the man or woman as a slave, should they ever escape.⁴ Many slave collars were mass produced and were used for various horrific purposes at the discretion of the slave holders. Interestingly, abolitionists may have exploited the disturbing nature of the blocks in order to convey the horrors of slavery in printed materials.

1 Author's discussion with Angelo Scarlato, Lauren Roedner and Carolyn Sautter, Director of Special Collections.

2 Thomas Branagan, *The Penitential Tyrant, or, Slave Trader Reformed* (New York, 1807), 271.

3 Dos Santos Soares, "Look, blackness in Brazil!: Disrupting the Grotesquerie of Racial Representation in Brazilian visual culture," in *Cultural Dynamics*, 24 (1) (2012): 75-101.

4 Smithsonian Institution, *Slavery and Abolition; Slave Collar*. http://www.civilwar.si.edu/slavery_collar.html



PRINT BLOCK

c. 1820s

Wood carving

7 x 6 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato



PRINT BLOCK

c. 1820s

Wood carving

7 x 6.5 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato

ABIGAIL CONNER

Harriet Beecher Stowe's novel *Uncle Tom's Cabin* shook the nation when it was published in 1852. A popular illustrated narrative about slavery, her book brought about enormous controversy.¹ This hand-colored Horace Thayer & Company lithograph depicts the main character Uncle Tom talking with Little Eva. In this lithograph, Tom is poorly dressed, with no shoes, and sits on the ground below and away from Little Eva. The illustration emphasizes the differences between Tom and Little Eva, in contrast to the first edition of the book, where Tom is depicted as a more sophisticated and well-dressed man.

Shortly after the book's publication, a theater adaptation was created in 1853. While the book is said to have brought progress, it is argued that the play did just the opposite. The dramatized versions did not hold the same political significance as the book, and the play pandered to white audiences' stereotypes and prejudices.² The poster *Legree Whipping Uncle Tom* was used to advertise the Harmount production of the play in Wilmington, Ohio in 1910. The company's poster appears more violent than other illustrations of the narrative, portraying the scene where Legree ties Uncle Tom to the whipping post and maliciously beats him. Both lithographs reveal different interpretations of an influential book and enforce established stereotypes.

1 Michele Wallace, "Uncle Tom's Cabin: Before and After the Jim Crow Era," *The MIT Press* 44, No. 1 (Spring 2000): 139.

2 Adena Spingarn, "When Uncle Tom Didn't Die: The Antislavery Politics of H.J. Conway's *Uncle Tom's Cabin*" *Theatre Survey* 53, No. 2 (September 2012): 1.

UNCLE TOM AND LITTLE EVA
HORACE THAYER & CO

1852

Lithograph

40 x 30 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato



LEGREE WHIPPING UNCLE TOM
HG DONALDSON LITHOGRAPH

c. 1910

Lithograph

90 x 65 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato



"FRANCHISE"
THOMAS NAST
HARPER'S WEEKLY
August 5, 1865
Newsprint
52.5 x 40 cm
Collection of Angelo Scarlato



"MUSTERED OUT"
ALFRED R. WAUD
HARPER'S WEEKLY
May 15, 1866
Newsprint
40.5 x 52.5 cm
Collection of Angelo Scarlato

NICOLE ANN CONTE

Published in *Harper's Weekly* immediately following the end of the Civil War, "Franchise" by Thomas Nast, the "Father of the American Political Cartoon," depicts Lady Columbia with her hand on a wounded African-American soldier just returned home from war. The caption reads "Franchise, and not this man?" This illustration is featured as part of a two-page spread in the August issue of *Harper's Weekly* in 1865 with another print titled *Pardon*. Here Nast refers to the hypocrisy that occurred shortly after the Civil War ended, with regard to the Southern leaders being pardoned for their involvement in the Secession, while African Americans were denied franchise, the right to vote.¹

Nast's "Franchise" reveals the restrictions on African Americans' civil rights during Reconstruction, while Alfred R. Waud's "Mustered Out" depicts the relief and joy of the soldiers returning home. Waud, one of *Harper's Weekly's* "Special Artists," shows a group of U.S. Colored Troops recently returned from their station in Duvall's Bluff to be greeted with affection by their wives and children in Little Rock, Arkansas.² As children run throughout the crowd with blankets for their fathers, Waud captures the energy of the celebration.³ Waud draws attention to the couple at the center of the image through the diagonal lines of the crossed guns intersecting at their embrace.

In both of these illustrations the artists depict the post-war life of African Americans and their struggle for freedom. "Mustered Out" conveys what it was like for wives celebrating the homecoming of their husbands, while in "Franchise," despite the proclamation of emancipation and the Union victory, the fight for African American rights continued.

¹ Albert Bigelow Paine, *Thomas Nast: his period and his pictures* / Albert Bigelow Paine; introd. by Morton Keller. n.p.: New York: Chelsea House, 1980., 1980, 106-107.

² Frederic E. Ray, and Alfred R. Waud, *Our special artist: Alfred R. Waud's Civil War* / Frederic E. Ray. n.p.: Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, c1994., 1994, 53, 183.

³ Ibid, 183.

VICTORIA PEREZ-ZETUNE

The two wax figurines appear to make a perfect pair, yet the items were found separately, and little is known about their origin. The male figure came from the New Orleans area in 1840-1850, and the female figure is also presumed to date to the 1840s. Because the man holds a sugarcane stalk, it is thought that they depict slaves from the Deep South. The clothing was made with fabric covered in wax and placed on a wooden block. The fragile nature of the pieces left the woman with a missing leg and a pin in her skirt. The man's entire arm is also held together by a pin. The woman is dressed in clothes of a house slave: a long skirt, a pleated apron, a striped long-sleeve shirt and a bonnet. The man's clothes are tattered and suggest his status as a field hand. His jacket sleeves are slightly short over his red torn shirt, and his pants legs are cuffed.

Although the dating of the works places these works decades earlier, the figurines resemble the work of Francisco Vargas (1824-1915). Beginning in 1874, Vargas sold wax figures and taught sculpting classes in New Orleans. Many of his works were inspired by the local black French Quarter merchants and vendors. Vargas' sculptures are similar not only in subject, but also in size and scale to the wax figures on display. Despite Vargas' recognition for his realism, he also created figures that reinforced racial stereotypes of the time.¹



FEMALE WAX FIGURINE

c. 1840

Mixed media

17 x 9 x 7 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato

MALE WAX FIGURINE

c. 1840s-1850s

Mixed media

17 x 8 x 8 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato

1. John Mangipano. "Remolding Mexican Identity: The Wax Art of Francisco Vargas in 19th Century New Orleans." (2011). *University of New Orleans Theses and Dissertations*. Paper 1327. Accessed 19 November 19, 2014.

LAUREN ROEDNER

Select southern slaves apprenticed to learn valuable skills like blacksmithing, weaving, or carpentry. They worked tirelessly to mill lumber, construct iron gates, shoe horses, manufacture hand tools, and provide them for many of the surrounding plantations. Tools were handcrafted by hot flames and hours of hammering and pounding malleable pieces of glowing iron into smooth hoes, sharp sickles, and knives. Talented slaves often marked their work with some symbol of ownership for their master. These same tools were then used by hundreds of field hands to farm endless acres of land, care for livestock, frame every plantation building, and improvise for any number of other demands thrust upon them.

Crafting these tools should have been a symbol of agency for the lucky few slaves who were allowed special training and opportunities outside of the mundane, arduous lives of slave laborers. This work, however, solidified their subordinate status by continuously providing the exact tools necessary for their enslavement. Rebellious slaves lost or broke tools and worked slowly to protest their condition. Skilled slaves, those with jobs on plantations, often rebuilt them. The higher-status work on the plantation, in fact, further deepened the institution of slavery.

Common slaves learned a few basic skills to weave their own reed baskets for a myriad of uses, mend or alter worn garments, whittle tools or the occasional prized toy for children. These items meant efficiency of work, pride in creation, and even satisfaction with their condition knowing they could be sold further south at any time. For a people who held few possessions but were instead the possessions of others, these few commodities most likely were cherished.



SHALLOW BASKET

Early nineteenth century
Natural fibers
44 x 43 x 13 cm
Collection of Angelo Scarlato

SICKLE

Mid-nineteenth century
Wood and metal
24 x 10 cm
Collection of Angelo Scarlato

KNIFE

Mid-nineteenth century
Wood and metal
22 x 4 cm
Collection of Angelo Scarlato

SAVANNAH ROSE



STORMING FORT WAGNER
KURZ & ALLISON

1890

Lithograph

66.5 x 84 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato

Storming Fort Wagner portrays the remarkable 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry, the first all black military unit during the American Civil War. Raised in May 1863, the unit was composed of 624 enlisted men along with their thirty-seven white officers. Based in Massachusetts, the 54th fought courageously in several battles along the East Coast, but is best known for their ground attack of Fort Wagner on Morris Island, South Carolina. Under the command of Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the 54th led the attack on July 18, 1863, suffering heavy losses including their beloved commander and 281 others.¹ The 54th refused to retreat despite the heavy firing that rained upon them, fighting until they were overwhelmed and retreated across the beaches.² Shaw volunteered the 54th for this charge; his intent was to prove that the men were brave warriors and that black troops were indispensable.

The lithograph commemorates the courageous 54th during their attack on Fort Wagner almost thirty years after the battle and exemplifies the valor of African American troops during the Civil War. One's eyes are drawn to Colonel Shaw with his sword held high close to the African American color bearer, both bravely fighting to abolish slavery.³ The color bearer was deemed the most courageous of his men, as he was most likely to be shot, and was always proud of his duty. The image reflects the devotion these men had to their nation and are shown equal in courage as their white officers. Although the 54th lost the battle along with over half of the unit, their bravery lives on within the lithograph.

¹ Brian C Pohanka, "America's Civil War: Fort Wagner and the 54th Massachusetts Volunteer Infantry," *America's Civil War Magazine*, September 1991, Accessed November 14, 2014. <http://www.historynet.com/americas-civil-war-fort-wagner-and-the-54th-massachusetts-volunteer-infantry.htm>.

² Joseph T. Glatthar, "'Glory,'" The 54th Massachusetts Infantry, and Black Soldiers in the Civil War," *The History Teacher* 24, no. 4 (1991): 475-85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/494706?ref=no-x-route:433ceb3b249689592d3218f48d0e82ce>.

³ "Some Commentary and Analysis of "The Storming of Fort Wagner,"" Accessed November 14, 2014. <http://www.cse.unr.edu/~woolever/civil/wagner.html>.

KAYLYN SAWYER

During the Antebellum and Civil War eras, photography in the form of daguerreotypes, ambrotypes, and tintypes gained popularity in America. In the South, these photographs often served as a way for members of the upper classes—particularly slaveholders—to demonstrate their wealth. In many instances, slaves were photographed alongside the family, which can indicate the fraught and important role of African Americans in slaveholding families. There was a broad spectrum of abuse and intimacy in the slave-master relationships of the nineteenth century, and African American women who acted as a “mammy” to the slaveholders’ children often held a complicated place in the family. Perhaps they were valued, even viewed with affection, yet these women were legally and socially thought of by their white owners as property, and therefore subordinate.

These three mid-nineteenth-century photographs reflect the idea of the slave as an integral yet unequal part of the family. The two photographs of African-American women emphasize the close relationship some slaves had with the children they are holding. Slaves would have cared for and might have loved these children, but a visible racial hierarchy remains prominent in these photographs. The children, positioned in the center of each image, hold a slightly dominant place over the African-American figures who act as frames and support to keep the children still during long film exposure times. All three of these photographs show that black women were, according to art historians Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, “implicitly bound to both the white child and its family as an object of subordination, however beloved.”¹



TOP LEFT

FRAMED AMBROTYPE

c. 1850s

12.5 cm x 10 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato

TOP RIGHT

FRAMED DAGUERREOTYPE

c. 1850s

12.5 cm x 10 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato

BOTTOM

FRAMED DAGUERREOTYPE

c. 1850s

10 cm x 9 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato



¹ Deborah Willis and Barbara Krauthamer, *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 8.



TOP LEFT
TINTYPE OF TWO WOMEN

c. 1870
Tintype
10.5 x 7 cm
Collection of Angelo Scarlato

TOP RIGHT
**LUCY COOPER (107 YEARS OLD)
PHOTOGRAPHED BY WM SUMMERHAYS**

c. 1870s
Carte-de-visite
10 x 6 cm
Collection of Angelo Scarlato

BOTTOM
MRS. GREY (MOTHER OF CLARA GREY)

1868
Tintype
21.5 x 16.5 cm
Collection of Angelo Scarlato

CAROLINE WOOD

These photographs of African-American women from the nineteenth century include one *cartes-de-visite* and two tintypes. *Cartes-de-visite* served as calling cards, while tintypes provided a less expensive alternative to earlier forms of photography produced on glass. Tintypes are produced by applying a chemical solution to a thin metal plate before being exposed. Both tintypes and *cartes-de-visite* grew increasingly popular among soldiers, immigrants, and people of the working class because in addition to being affordable they were quick to produce and portable.

Each of these photographs portrays African-American women in a dignified and proper manner at a time when they were generally considered to be of lesser value in comparison to their white counterparts. From these images alone, it is unclear whether these women were indeed slaves or what injustices they might have endured. It is evident that at least one of them was a slave; a handwritten note on the back identifies the Civil War-era portrait as Lucy Cooper at 107 years old and the photographer's stamp identifies the location of his studio in Nantucket. According to the Nantucket Historical Association, a black woman named Lucy Cooper lived on the island in the middle of the nineteenth century. Nantucket became a safe haven for a number of African-American families who were emancipated from the southern slave culture. The Nantucket Historical Association reports that Cooper was "respected by her own people as well as the members of the white community."¹

These photographs create a more nuanced image of African-American women in nineteenth-century America. The individuals are portrayed in a formal manner, and therefore as subjects rather than objects. Their identity is not bound to their status or value to a white family, but is self-constructed and appreciated for their own memory and meaning.

¹ "African-American Women in Nineteenth-Century Nantucket" *Nantucket Historical Association*, 1992. <http://www.nha.org/history/hn/HNgoode-african.htm>.

ZOE YEOH

As an illustrator for *Harper's Weekly*, Thomas Nast (1840-1902) was one of the most influential political cartoonists in America and created images of war and other sociopolitical issues, including this image featured in *Harper's Weekly's* January 24, 1863 centerfold. He is perhaps best known for his illustrations of the Elephant and Donkey party symbols, Santa Claus, and Uncle Sam, as well as his scenes of the American Civil War, which garnered praise from President Lincoln.¹

"The Emancipation of the Negroes" depicts African Americans pre- and post-Emancipation and was published shortly after Lincoln's Emancipation Proclamation on January 1, 1863. In the center circular frame, a seemingly happy and prosperous African American family gathers by the stove. A portrait of Lincoln hangs on the wall, and printed on the stove is the word "Union." Several generations of family members are shown to contrast with the institution of slavery, when family members were sold and separated. Above this domestic scene, Lady Liberty and Father Time stand protectively around the African American family.² To the left of the central frame are images of the horrors of slavery. A white man whips the bare back of a woman in the bottom left corner. In contrast, the right half shows opportunities for education and wage earning.

Readership of *Harper's Weekly* was common throughout the North, where citizens sympathetic to the abolitionist movement were interested in the published images of the horrors of slavery.³ Even the publishing date, a few weeks after the New Year, symbolizes a change in the attitudes of whites towards African Americans. The accompanying article clearly reflects an abolitionist perspective, as *Emancipation* drew parallels in the lives of white readers to those of African Americans. In making this comparison, Nast softens the bitter reality surrounding emancipation and the highly political edge he usually brings to his illustrations. His illustration invokes a new chapter in American history.



"THE EMANCIPATION OF THE NEGROES"

HARPER'S WEEKLY

January 24, 1863

Newsprint

53 x 69 cm

Collection of Angelo Scarlato

¹ Wendy Wick Reaves, "Thomas Nast and the President," *American Art Journal*, 19 (1987): 60.

² "Emancipation," *Harper's Weekly*, January 24, 1863.

³ Lee W. Formwalt, Robert Crumley and Philip Joiner, "Petitioning Congress for Protection: A Black View of Reconstruction at the Local Level," *Georgia Historical Society*, 73(1989): 307.

ART, ARTIFACT, ARCHIVE:

African-American Experiences in the Nineteenth Century

JANUARY 23 – MARCH 7, 2015

GALLERY TALK: JANUARY 23, 2015, 5 PM

RECEPTION: JANUARY 23, 5-7 PM

Students in Dr. Shannon Egan's course "Art and Public Policy" curate an exhibition of art and artifacts related to African-American experiences and representations in the nineteenth-century selected from the private collection of Angelo Scarlato.

Diane Brennan	Nicole Ann Conte	Kaylyn Sawyer
Maura Conley	Victoria Perez-Zetune	Caroline Wood
Abigail Conner	Savannah Rose	Zoe Yeoh

with special contributor Lauren Roedner

This exhibition is supported in part by the John and Marie Zimmermann Fund.

Cover Image: *Two Women*, tintype, c. 1870s. Collection of Angelo Scarlato.
Image courtesy of Special Collections/Musselman Library, Gettysburg College.

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