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SOUTHERN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES: The Portrait Photography of Florestine Perrault Collins and Richard Samuel Roberts

by

Stephanie M. Woody-Groshelle

Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master Art in Art History and Visual Culture
at Lindenwood University

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SOUTHERN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES: The Portrait Photography of Florestine Perrault Collins and Richard Samuel Roberts

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty of the School of Arts, Media, and Communications
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the
Degree of Master in Fine Arts
at
Lindenwood University

By

Stephanie Marie Woody-Groshelle

Saint Charles, Missouri

August, 2022

SOUTHERN AFRICAN AMERICAN COMMUNITIES: PHOTOGRAPH PORTRAITS OF
FLORESTINE PERRAULT COLLINS, RICHARD SAMUEL ROBERTS

Stephanie M. Woody-Groshelle, Master of Art History and Visual Culture, 2022

Thesis Directed by: Matthew Bailey, PhD

ABSTRACT

This thesis is about the portrait photographers, Florestine Perrault Collins (1895-1988) and Richard Samuel Roberts (1880-1936), and how their photographs portrayed “non-othering” representations of their sitters. Collin and Roberts’ works are compared to Southern white photographers from the Jim Crow era to argue for how “non-othering” portraits of their community members were produced. This impacts the way identity can be perceived. Religious and educational themed portraits are used to align a visually associated identity with social values the New Orleans Creole and Columbia, South Carolina communities had. This thesis considers Collins’ and Roberts’ portraits in relation to the state of their communities. The portraits in this thesis are discussed through integrating aesthetic evaluation with the Jim Crow era societal state of the New Orleans Creole and the African American Columbia, South Carolina communities. The thesis argues for the importance of these photographers’ role in giving control over visual representation to their respective communities.

Acknowledgements

I dedicate this thesis paper to my committee chair, Dr. Matthew Bailey. His mastery over written articulation inspired me. Dr. Bailey provided both positive encouragement and challenging feedback that helped me write about this important subject.

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Introduction

Early twentieth century photographers, Florestine Perrault Collins (1895-1988) and Richard Samuel Roberts (1880-1936) collaborated with individuals in their communities to create portraits contrary to an imposed othering from the Jim Crow era visual culture. Othering is a word that expresses the alienation of a group, in this case, African Americans. Hence, I use the word "non-othering" to describe Collins' and Roberts' unique portrayal of the Creole and African American communities. This thesis explores what portraits made by Collins and Roberts disclose about their communities through a "non-othering" perspective. I investigate how this approach shows and what these individuals and communities were like.

White Jim Crow visual culture reinforced the othering of African American citizens through relentless dehumanizing and impersonal portrayal. Images of negative stereotypes were published. Glorified, violent photos of lynched faceless, black bodies were sold as memorabilia. The lack of a defined individual not only othered the victim, but also denied an identity.[1] This visual representation of African Americans justified murder, unfair policies, and societal segregation. It reinforced Jim Crow era boundaries of black and white space. White meant clean, and belonged; non-white was othered.[2] Collins' and Roberts' work counteracted this negative assault; they made photography an accessible way to portray image for many African American individuals.[3] I argue that the portraits did more than counteract; they constructed appropriate

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[1] Leigh Raiford, "Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory." *History and Theory* 48, no. 4 (2009),114. Accessed June 11, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/25621443.

[2] Elizabeth Abel, *Signs of the Times : The Visual Politics of Jim Crow* (Berkeley, Calif: University of California Press, 2010): 73, https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=357622&site=ehost-live.

[3] Abel, *Signs of the Times,* 63.

representations of the community members. Collins' and Roberts' studios provided access for African Americans to have their pictures made; most white photographers refused to serve black people in their studios.[4]

Florestine Perrault Collins (figure 1) was born in the Creole community of New Orleans, Louisiana. Collins was not satisfied with the ascribed traditional stay at home role expected of Catholic Creole women. When she was fourteen years old, she used her light skin for what was commonly referred to as the "pass as white" strategy to begin the process of learning her practice in portrait photography. Collins was hired by the white photographer, Jerome Hannafin. She learned what she called a "quick finish" technique. This instant development technique would later aid in the success of her busy studio on South Rampart Street.[5] Collins used this training to establish herself as a photographer in the Creole community. She mostly photographed portraits of women, children, and religious milestones, like the sacrament rituals of Little Communion, Big Communion, and weddings.[6] In 1917, Collins married her first husband, Eilert Bertrand. He was described as a repressive, controlling husband. He enforced the Catholic ideal that required women to stay in the home. Collins was not able to interact in the public sphere of New Orleans.[7] However, this did not put and end to her ambitions of being a photographer. With the active support of her family, Collins' practice thrived. Her grandmother tended to home chores, giving

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[4] Anthony. *Picturing Black New Orleans: A Creole Photographer's View of the Early Twentieth Century,*(University of Florida Press. 2012), 42.

[5] Arthé A. Anthony. *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 2.

[6] Anthony. *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 23, 42. Little Communion and Big Communion were words the Creole community used in reference to the Catholic sacraments of Confirmation. Little communion was received when the child was seven. Big Communion was observed when the youth turned twelve.

[7] Anthony. *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 37.

Collins time to work. Her dad and brothers built necessary items for her studio operation. Experiencing success within the Creole community, Collins moved her studio and home to the busy Claiborne Street in 1923.[8]

Collins' marriage to Bertrand did not last. In 1917, she divorced him, and married his former friend, Herbert Collins. At this point, Florestine Perrault Collins' life and career changed. For the first time, she was able to actively participate in the public sphere. She expanded her practice to include sitters from the broader African American culture of New Orleans. She eventually moved her studio to South Rampart Street where she experienced further success. Many African American community members and visitors had their pictures made through her walk-in service.[9] Collins' studio remained in operation through 1949, then she moved to California.[10] Her photographs found their place in the family albums of the Creole and African American communities of New Orleans. Her grandniece, Dr. Arthe' A. Anthony, worked to recover some of the portraits, which were published in her book, *Picturing Black New Orleans.*

Collins photographed niece, *Arth'e C. Perrault* (figure 2). The youth is dressed in completely in white. She holds her rosary and missal while smiling subtly at the camera. This is her day for observing the Catholic rite of Confirmation, or Little Communion.[11] Surrounding her is a background of flowers and a pool. She stands on a floral carpet. The background does not passively fill space, rather it interacts with the young sitter. The upper third of the photograph

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[8] Anthony. *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 54.

[9] Anthony. *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 12.

[10] Anthony. *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 105.

[11] Anthony. *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 45.

contains a large sphere of light that encases the girl's head. Edges of the circle blend into light grays. From the light gray tones, dogwood flowers appear faintly on both sides of the girl. From the middle to the lower areas of the photograph, the flowers become clearer, along with the appearance of the water. This lower half of the photo contains soft shadows that frame the girl's body. These shadows are carefully tempered to accent, not contrast the girl. Blotches of shadows on the floral floor in contrast to the white shoes suggests that the girl is floating. Collins used the background to reinforce the symbolic meanings of her niece's participation of Confirmation. The sphere of light and water are holy symbols associated with Catholic dogma. Collins frequently used lighting and props as expressive elements in her work. The interplay between lights and shadows in her portraits capture dynamic interactions between the sitter and the background.

Richard Samuel Roberts (figure 3), a native of Fernanda, Florida, made portraits his entire life.[12] He taught himself the practice of photography through acquiring books and magazines while working for the post office. In Florida, Roberts set up his first photography studio, The Gem. He married Wilhelmina Williams, who was born in Columbia, South Carolina. Roberts left his Gem Studio in Florida due to his wife's inability to adapt to the Florida climate. The couple relocated to her native Columbia, South Carolina, where Roberts continued his work for the postal service. He immediately set up another photography studio, first in his house, then on Washington Street.[13] Roberts became the photographer for the Columbian African American community; he photographed thousands of individuals and groups from 1920 to a year before his

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[12] Thomas L. Johnson, and Phillip C. Dunn. *A True Likeness : The Black South of Richard Samuel Roberts, 1920–1936,* (Columbia, South Carolina: University of South Carolina Press, 2019), 4.

[13] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 1.

death in 1936.[14] Roberts' glass plate negatives were stored under his house to eventually be discovered and developed in the late 1970s.[15]

Roberts photographed educator, *Eva Prioleau Trezevant* (figure 4) 1927.[16] Eva looks seriously at the viewer. She wears a long necklace, dark sweater, and light shirt. Round glasses frame her face, enlarging her eyes. The background is a gradation of shadows that range from a dark gray that frames the sides of the sitter, to a light gray in the middle of the composition. These varying gray tones lift the sitter forward, and support the visibility of material textures that make up her sweater and necklace. Roberts used his mastery of lighting to accomplish two different effects: contrast and modeling. While there is a sharp contrast in the sitter's clothes, her face is gently sculpted, or modeled with softer lights and shadows. Two common elements in Roberts' work are accenting material texture and manipulating lights and shadows to define the sitter.

Both Collins and Roberts operated their studios during the time when Southern Jim Crow laws sanctioned racial segregation, and enabled a constant threat of violence against African Americans. This societal structure, which began in the late nineteenth century, physically divided the races so interaction would be limited.[17] Jim Crow laws remained an inescapable reality for the Southern region of the United States for most of the twentieth century. One of these realities,

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[14] Richard Samuel Roberts, *Our Time, Our Place:Photographs of the Black South (Teaching Kit),* (Columbia, SC: The Columbia Museum of Art, 2011),10, 12. https://www.columbiamuseum.org/sites/default/files/pdfs/RobertsTeachingKit.pdf.

[15] Roberts, *Our Time, Our Place*, 20.

[16]Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,*167.

[17] Elizabeth Guffey, "Knowing Their Space: Signs of Jim Crow in the Segregated South." *Design Issues* 28, No. 2 (2012): 44. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41427825

for example, lay in discriminatory practices, like sharecropping. These operations perpetuated poverty and lack of opportunity for prosperity. Social restrictions caused mass migrations of African Americans to urban areas and the industrialized North. Jim Crow era segregation influenced how black communities formed in urban areas throughout the South.[18] One characteristic was how civil rights issues consumed these southern African American communities, including New Orleans and Columbia. Segregation, denial of equal treatment, suppression of political participation, and lynchings were amongst many topics in African American newspapers like Columbia, South Carolina's *Palmetto Leader*.[19] Richard Samuel Roberts read this newspaper, and regularly placed his advertisements in it.[20] One of his advertisements (figure 5) is in the Saturday, December, 12, 1925 issue.[21] Roberts realized his photography business functioned as part of validating individuals in the Columbia, South Carolina community.

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[18] Douglas R. Hurt. *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950, 3,4*. (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2003), https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=113825&site=ehost-live

[19] Unknown, *Palmetto Leader,* December 12, 1925: Image 1, https://historicnewspapers.sc.edu/lccn/s93067919/1925-12-12/ed-1/seq-1/# . Most articles centered around the advocacy of the N.A.A.C.P. This organization provided practice of bail bonding and gave access to lawyers for African American citizens. For example, the December 12, 1925 edition editorial compelled the readers to think about questions concerning civil rights and sacrifice written about in the December edition of *Crisis* Magazine. The front page discussed the New Abolitionist Movement, which was aimed at obtaining freedom from "caste slavery." This insightful article proposed points of a peaceful strategy, which included: educating the public, use the courts, legislation, "intelligent use of the ballot," and economic stimulus. The reader was encouraged to not despair the slow change. The *Palmetto Leader* served as a valuable source of information, as well as a voice against the culture of white supremacy.

[20] Roberts, *Our Time, Our Place*, 25.

[21] Richard Samuel Roberts, "Yes! Merry Christmas," *Palmetto Leader*, December 12, 1925: Image 6. https://historicnewspapers.sc.edu/lccn/sn93067919/1925-12-19/ed-1/seq-1/\

From advertisements to the visual product, Collins and Roberts participated in the process of visually representing aspects of their communities' identity. Their photographs became permanent visual artifacts because images invoke meaningful memories.[22] "Critical Black Memory," coined by Leigh Raiford, refers to the importance of photographs to African Americans in the way that memory is stored, and can be recalled. There is an intimate quality about the portraits by Collins and Roberts, because they were intended for family and friends. The community members can recognize themselves and their family in these photographs. Storing memory is associated with the way identity is going to be perceived.[23] Therefore, portraits made by Collins and Roberts serves as permanent memories in which the changing communities interact with their past, and contemplate the present and future.[24] Collins' grand niece, Dr. Arthe' Anthony orchestrated the resurfacing of the Creole and African Americans of New Orleans memories.[25] Accessing stored memory happened during the process of recovering Roberts' work. In 1977, a member of the Columbian community, remembered her neighbor, the long deceased photographer, Richard Samuel Roberts. She offered this lead to a University of Columbia archival project. Her simple suggestion resulted in the bringing forth of the Columbian community's black memory.[26] These communities can now interact with identity from the 1920s through the 1940s, as they realize how their histories affect them.[27] This thesis participates in

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[22] Raiford, "Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory," 113.

[23] Raiford, "Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory," 113.

[24] Raiford, "Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory," 120.

[25] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 108,110.

[26] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 1.

[27] Raiford, "Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory," 115.

discursive findings for further investigating the memories of the Collin's Creole and Roberts' Columbian communities.

Chapter one analyzes how creating "non-othering" portraits is contingent upon relationships between photographers and sitters. Collins and Roberts had a unique advantage in forming relationships; they were the same race as their communities. In 1849, Frederick Douglass (1818-1895), the well-known African American orator, expressed, "that a white photographer would not be able to photograph African Americans because there would be no room for fairness."[28] Collins and Roberts did not contend with barriers of the color-line. I argue that their race enabled them to have a unique dynamic with their sitters. Portraits of African Americans made by Southern white photographers, Mary Britton Connor (1863-1936), Henry Norman (1850-1913), and Rosalee Gwathmey (1908-2001) are compared with Collins' and Roberts' works. These white photographers' perception of black identity stifled a connection between the photographer and the sitter. This first chapter juxtaposes derogatory portrayals, intentional or not, with truly dignified portraits.

Chapter two continues to analyze portraits made by Collins and Roberts through the "non-othering" lens. I discuss how their works reflect identity that is connected to religious and educational roles. These institutions held together many southern African American communities.[29] To gain relief from the constant harassment of white presence, African American churches functioned as highly important spaces away from white threat.[30] For Collins and the

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[28] Joshua Brown, "Historians and Photography," *American Art* 21, no. 3 (2007): 9. Accessed July 5, 2021. doi:10.1086/526475

[29] Hurt, *African American Life in the Rural South,* 55.

[30] Hurt, *African American Life in the Rural South,* 55.

Creole culture, the Catholic church was important in preserving their identity. Most of the Creole religious identity lay in sacrament milestones and weddings, rather than specific spiritual leaders. Milestones with child subjects were common religious themes in Collin's work like the *Unidentified Graduate and Communicate* (figure 12). In contrast to the Creole community, Roberts' Columbian community was Protestant. His portraits were of spiritual leaders who were directly connected to their congregation.

The institution of education was also vital to the building of African American communities of the Jim Crow era. Segregated schools were a part of this societal climate; black communities worked to establish schools.[31] The Creole community desired to exist in a closed culture, meaning that they had little to do with white people and darker skinned African Americans.[32] Education identity for the Creole community was influenced by Catholic values. This meant private Catholic school was the path of education for the Creole community. Through segregating themselves, they did not have to contend with white people and darker skinned African Americans.[33] Roberts and his community in Columbia, South Carolina worked to portray Protestant values of the black middle class. They placed much emphasis in actively building thriving educational institutions, like Allen University, Benedict College and Booker T. Washington School.[34]

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[31] Roberts, *Our Time, Our Place*, 28,29.

[32] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 19.

[33] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 22.

[34] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,2*.

Chapter three analyzes the "non-othering" representation of individuals from the Creole and Columbian communities. This is for the purpose of obtaining a glimpse of what these communities were like. The photography critic, Roland Barthes (1915-1980), argued for considering more than one photograph to cultivate meaning.[35] I will use this consideration for evaluating the "non-othering" characteristics of Collins' and Roberts' portraits compared to their communities as a whole during the Jim Crow era.

Literary Review

I constructed this thesis through research that centered around societal conditions and the biographies of Collins, Roberts, and some of the sitters. Only a few sources about Collins and Roberts are found; however, they contain significant photographs and information about sitters. Collins' great grandniece, Dr. Arte' A. Anthony wrote *Picturing Black New Orleans: A Creole Photographer's View of the Early Twentieth Century,* along with an accompanying article about Collins' life, work, family, and the Creole community. Anthony uses photographs as visual evidence to present Collins' career in New Orleans.[36] The book details how the Creole community functioned religiously. For example, Anthony's writings include Collins' religious portrait, *Unidentified Graduate and Communicant* (figure 12), and provides information on how the Catholic church was interlaced with Creole identity.[37] With the permission of the Roberts family, Thomas Johnson and Phillip C. Dunn, professors from University of South Carolina,

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[35] Pierre Taminiaux, *The Paradox of Photography*. (Amsterdam:Brill, 2009), https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=288655&site=ehost-live, 100.

[36] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 108.

[37] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 19.

Columbia published the book, *A True Likeness: the Black South of Richard Samuel Roberts.* This book has biographical information accompanied with an array of photos Roberts made from 1920-1935. Researchers and the African American community of Columbia, South Carolina gathered information about the sitters where possible.[38] This book also introuduces other sources, such as the South Carolina African American newspaper, *The Palmetto Leader,* and the Richard Samuel Roberts teaching toolkit, *Our Time, Our Place:Photographs of the Black South.* The toolkit was published by the Columbia Museum of Art in 2011. Both the toolkit and historic newspaper archive discusses events and reactions of the Jim Crow era climate. *The Palmetto Leader* directly preserves what African Americans in Roberts' community were thinking and discussing. These sources document the otherwise obscured life of African Americans in Columbia, South Carolina after World War I.

Chapter one's contrast between the white photographers, Collins and Roberts was influenced by the research of historian, Susan T. Falck's. Her book chapter, "Picture Makers": Black and White Historical Memory in Postbellum Natchez" from the book, *Remembering Dixie: The Battle to Control Historical Memory in Natchez, Mississippi,* and Lili Corbus' article, "Picturing Charlotte: An Introduction to Rosalie Gwathmey's Photographs of African Americans in the 1940s" provides social context and biographical information. The authors also discuss how these white photographers' approached photographing their African American sitters. The white photographers' perspectives and motivations formulated how African American sitters were othered, or viewed as an alienated group. Chapter one analyzes this phenomenon of othering and

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[38] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,*1.

"non-othering" through the juxtaposition of the white photographers' and Collins' and Roberts' work.

Falck's book chapter discusses the complex visual history of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century South through the creation of African American portraits made by Southern white photographers, Mary Britton Connor and Henry Norman.[39] Their ideals differed; Connor believed in the "lost cause myth." This ideology hinged on pre-Civil War nostalgia. Norman wished to create dignified portraits of African American sitters.[40] Falck presents an awareness that white Southern views have never been monolithic through comparing Norman's practice to ideals carried by Frederick Douglass.[41] The chapter backs my argument for how white photographers contended with racial barriers, whereas Collins and Roberts did not. Falck's book cued me to further research the identity of Norman's unique looking sitter, *Alex Mazique* (figure 8). I found information about the Mazique family in Florence Ridlon's book, *A Black Physician's Struggle for Civil Rights: Edward C. Mazique, M.D*. Ridlon relays an account of Alex's personality and social status.[42] I used this source to compare Alex Mazique's personality with the portrait that Norman made.

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[39] Susan T. Falck, ""Picture Makers": Black and White Historical Memory in Postbellum Natchez." *In Remembering Dixie: The Battle to Control Historical Memory in Natchez, Mississippi, 1865–1941*, (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2019), 105. Accessed September 12, 2021. doi:10.2307/j.ctvpbnpsv.8

[40] Falck, ""Picture Makers," 120.

[41] Falck, ""Picture Makers," 109.

[42] Florence Ridlon, *A Black Physician's Struggle for Civil Rights : Edward C. Mazique, M.D. Sixties--Primary Documents and Personal Narratives, 1960-1974,* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 2005), 9. https://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=407059&site=ehost-live.

Both Corbus and Falck discuss white photographers and African American subjects in the Southern Jim Crow climate. Corbus' subject centers around photographer, Rosalee Gwathmey and the African American community of Charlotte, N.C. Her article issues discursive information about segregated Charlotte, North Carolina. Gwathmey's portrayal of the African American community of Charlotte was one-sided. This perception resulted in the discussion about the control over portrayal.[43] Control over image is a main point in my argument for true representation of black visual culture. Corbus' social and photographic analysis was influential in discussing the effects of control Roberts and the Columbian community had over their images.

Methodology

My approach to this thesis about Collins' and Roberts' work adopts historian, Joshua Brown's argument of viewing photographs as a source, and compliments the research about the language of photography. Brown's "Historians and Photograph" article compels historians to use photography as more than archival evidence or visual additions to a text. He urges historians and researchers to observe the nature of a culture and time from which a historical photograph originated. Controversy over the truthfulness of photography motivates many historians to avoid using photographs as a primary source. However, Brown suggested, "alterations made by photographers, such as poses and props offer worthy insight on the general psyche of the culture or time."[44]

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[43] Lili Corbus, "Picturing Charlotte: An Introduction to Rosalie Gwathmey's Photographs of African Americans in the 1940s." *Studies in Popular Culture*, Vol. 29, no. 2 (2006): 51. Accessed September 8, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/41970409

[44] Brown, "Historians and Photography," 12.

Three categories shape the contents of this thesis. First, I framed the portrait interpretations around Southern historical information about African American life from Reconstruction through the Jim Crow era. New Orleans Creole and Columbian histories include information about nature of the communities, and individuals whose portraits are featured. Second, I relied on sources that explain how southern African American visual culture progressed from the late nineteenth century throughout the twentieth century. This is pertinent in studying how and why modern African American visual culture developed to analyze Collins' and Roberts' "non-othering" portraits. Third, I chose sources that explain how portrait photography exude characteristics of the sitters.

Historical sources align with the question of identity of the Creole and Columbian communities, specifically in chapter two. The concept of identity covers a broad sphere; therefore, I narrowed the discussion to focus the influential institutions religion and education. Religion and education were significant in influencing the formation of African American community identity during the Reconstruction and Jim Crow era.[45] Religion and education were necessary for the continuance of the Creole community, yet the function was not the same. These institutions were key influences that dictated the nature of these communities. This was a strong way to begin this discussion of "non-othering" identity. Chapter two analyzes Creole and Columbian identity through the lens of religion and education. Dr. Arthe' A. Anthony's book, *Picturing Black New Orleans: A Creole Photographer's View of the Early Twentieth Century* combined with Sylvie Dubois and Megan Melancon's article, "Creole Is, Creole Ain't: Diachronic and Synchronic Attitudes toward Creole Identity in Southern Louisiana" provided the

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[45] Hurt, *African American Life in the Rural South,* 55.

information that contextualized the religious identity of Collins' Creole sitters. These sources discuss how the Creole community approached issue of education in a society that would only perceive colored and white.[46] For the purpose of preservation, Catholic schools became an option over segregated public schools.[47] Creole histories present the origin of values, and what was done to preserve their cultural identity. Dubois and Melancon's article describes the change and social dynamics of the Creole people throughout the history of New Orleans.[48] These Creole histories clarify how Collins' photographs can be understood in relation to early twentieth century portrayal, and the changes this culture, including Collins, experienced.

Agricultural historian, Douglas R. Hurt establishes the importance of both religion and education in relation to the development of Southern African American communities in his book, *African American Life in the Rural South.* Hurts' book does not align with the dynamics of the Creole community; however, it offers insight to understanding the formation of the Columbian community during Reconstruction. Through analyzing African American religious denominations, Hurt argues for the value of churches as both a point of growth, and a safe haven for black communities in the South.[49] From this protective sphere of religion, education thrived.[50] Hurt's information narrowed my focus on religious and educational aspects of identity.

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[46] Sylvie Dubois and Megan Melançon. "Creole Is, Creole Ain't: Diachronic and Synchronic Attitudes toward Creole Identity in Southern Louisiana." Language in Society, Vol. 29, no. 2 (Jun., 2000): 242.

[47] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 22.

[48] Dubois, S., "Creole Is, Creole Ain't," 238.

[49] Hurt, *African American Life in the Rural South,* 55.

[50] Hurt, *African American Life in the Rural South,* 58.

This source helps my argument for the foundational values of religion and education represented in Roberts' portraits.

Theoretical sources for this thesis provide insight on how Collins' and Roberts' photographs impacted their communities. I prioritized African American positions on visual culture for discussing the concept of "non-othering." African American scholars, Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith's compiled a book of essays, *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity.* This book is central for explaining how African American communities developed and controlled visual culture through photography. Famous orator, Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) lectured about creating powerful portraits. I argue that the practices of Collins and Roberts aligned with his views. Wallace and Smith discuss Douglass' emphasis on the gravity of influence portraiture has in African American visual culture. The introduction addresses of Douglass' argument for the potency of photography as a tool to achieve equality and civil rights.[51] Douglass believed that white people were unable to capture the true essence of an African American sitter.[52] Making an authentic likeness possessed soul-creating power that would ultimately allow African Americans to realize their present and future as equal citizens. For Douglass, photography is a medium that proves existence, hence it possesses the potential to create soul.[53] This source shapes my argument for

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[51] Maurice O. Wallace, and Shawn Michelle Smith, Editors. *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity,* (Durham and London: Duke University Press), 2012, 6.

[52] Wallace, M., *Pictures and Progress*, 21.

[53] Wallace, M., *Pictures and Progress*, 24.

Collins' and Roberts' work as a manifestation of Douglass' insights about the relationship between the portrait and the realization of African American identity.

American philosophers, Richard Shusterman and Cynthia Freeland present how photographers accomplish making aesthetic, authentic portraits. Richard Shusterman's article, "Photography as Performative Process," delves into the psychological experience and theatrical roles between the photographer and the sitter. He explains how the sitters and photographers control visual language in portraiture through working together to make a picture.[54] "The photographer cultivates trust so the sitter will become uninhibited."[55] This dialogue between the photographer and the sitter clarifies meanings in the portraits Collins and Roberts made.

Cynthia Freeland's article, "Portraits in Painting and Photography" adds a layer of depth to Shusterman's perspective on performance through her philosophical analysis of what makes a successful portrait. In summary, Freeland explains, "a good portrait relies on revealing truths about the sitter while allowing the artist to have creative expression."[56] Criteria for interpreting portraits is established by modes in relation to the subject and sitter.[57] This task includes producing the evidence of likeness, essence, psychological states, and unique attributes of the sitter.[58] Freeland expands on how this process is distinctively useful for interpreting

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[54] Richard Shusterman, "Photography as Performative Process," *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 70, no. 1 (2012): 71. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42635857

[55] Shusterman, "Photography as Performative Process," 69.

[56] Cynthia Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography." *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition* 135, no. 1 (2007): 95–109. http://www.jstor.org/stable/40208798, 95.

[57] Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 97.

[58] Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 100.

photographs.[59] Perspectives of both Shusterman and Freeland influence my analysis of how Collins' and Roberts' photographs materialized the identity through visual elements.

"Non-othered" portraits I discuss in chapter three are analyzed to illustrate how Collins, Roberts created a visual memory of their communities without white interference. In his book, *The Paradox of Photography,* French professor, Pierre Taminiaux grounds the debate of subjective complications in photograph analysis. He discusses the various directions that are approached by visual theorist, like Roland Barthes.[60] Viewing photographs together, Barthes believed, offers continuous discourse about the context in which they were made.[61] This source influences my arrangement of the portraits in chapter three. Various aspects of Collins' portraits of women indicate changes the Creole community was experiencing. Roberts' portraits of individuals associated with activism, religion and education reveal identity traits that were continuously important to the African American community in Columbia during the early decades of the twentieth century.

Collins and Roberts' work reflect the memory power of photographs. Leigh Raiford's article, "Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory" frames the intimate role portraits play in the Creole and Columbian communities through the interaction between "critical black memory" and identity construction. In conjunction with their role of "critical black memory," portraits discussed in this thesis align with the criteria of being cultural heritage artifacts. Cultural heritage researcher, Erin Linn-Tynen wrote about the importance of these

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[59] Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 102.

[60] Taminiaux. *The Paradox of Photography*, 100.

[61] Taminiaux. *The Paradox of Photography*, 100, 101.

artifacts in "Reclaiming the Past as a Matter of Social Justice: African American Heritage, Representation and Identity in the United States." She describes how cultural heritage artifacts will "evoke emotions, confirm or communicate identity and remind communities from where they came."[62] These sources foreground the analysis that correlates the portraits with identity.

Most research on Florestine Perrault Collins and Richard Samuel Roberts originate from a combination of new historicist, race, and ethnic studies. My approach remains similar. For analyzing the portraits, however, I include formalism. This descriptive method centers around the compositional elements and design Collins and Roberts used to create the images of their sitters. Formal elements foreground my claims for interpretation. Added to this, I employ a combination of the new historicist and race and ethnic study to further discuss meanings. New historicist criteria lends attention to cultures and art works that are not discussed in the mainstream spaces. Collins' and Roberts' work correlate with the time in which they were made. Today, the portraits they made are relevant cultural artifacts. Race and ethnic studies seek to recognize and cultivate the appreciation of the experiences of diverse groups. The visual culture of New Orleans Creole, and the African American community of Columbia, South Carolina are understudied.

Limitations of this study stem from a lack of scholarship that focuses on deeper discussions of works made by Collins and Roberts. What has been written about them is mostly comprised of biographical information, and the appraisal of their photographs as significant historical artifacts. No scholarly works discuss the aesthetic nature of their photographs. Some of

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[62] Erin Linn-Tynen, "Reclaiming the Past as a Matter of Social Justice: African American Heritage,Representation and Identity in the United States." *In Critical Perspectives on Cultural Memory and Heritage: Construction, Transformation and Destruction*, edited by Veysel Apaydin, (UCL Press, 2020), 260. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv13xpsfp.21.

my arguments may be seen as subjective because of this lack of scholarship. This limitation has an advantage, because other research questions emerge about their work. Unfortunately, not many photographs of Collins have been found, which was another constraint I encountered when writing this thesis. Aligning cultural information with examples of her portraits was challenging. For example, I could not find any of Collins' portraits that portrayed the Creole schools from the 1920s. Many of the portraits she produced went to family albums. It is suspect that much of her work may have been destroyed when Hurricane Katrina devastated New Orleans in 2005.[63]

Cultural memory is a major function of Collins' and Roberts' work, today. For the purposes of adequately interpreting the visual language of the portraits, it was important to gather information on the Creole and Columbian communities during the time in which these photographers lived. Identifying sitters, and gathering information about them was part of this process. Many, but not all of the sitters were identified. In Roberts' case, there were records, such as census data and historic newspaper advertisements, of how they were known in their community. There is, however, limited knowledge about the sitters, themselves. Diaries and detailed family histories would have been helpful to find out significance meanings of items such as attire and adornment choices. I relied on research about their communities to form interpretations of the portraits.

Chapter 1: The Photographer and the Sitter

Florestine Perrault Collins (1895-1988) and Richard Samuel Roberts (1880-1936) made portraits of their community members without white interference. Southern white photographers,

[63] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 108.

Mary Britton Connor (1863-1936), Henry Norman (1850-1913), and Rosalee Gwathmey (1908-2001) also made portraits of African Americans. This chapter analyzes works from all of these photographers to examine how "non-othering" portraits were made. This group of white photographers was chosen because they lived during the same era, and represented Southern white viewpoints. Three contrasting points covered in this chapter are: the "lost cause myth" and African American reality, dignified portraits and the color line, and the representation of youth. A frame of reference for discussion centers around views Frederick Douglass (1838-1882) espoused about the African American relationship with portraiture. Douglass believed that photography was the medium in which self-representation was possible, meaning this avenue of visual culture possessed a way to elevate civil status. The language he used to drive meaning was metaphorical, relating the image-making process to soul-creating and realizing the future.[64] I argue that Collins and Roberts fulfilled this soul-creating representation described by Douglass. They established a good rapport with their sitters; they were technically skilled portrait photographers.

The "Lost Cause Myth" and African American Reality

Mammy is Mad (figure 6) is a portrait of an elderly African American woman sitting on the steps of a southern house in Natchez, Mississippi. Contrasting light and shadows spill over the composition, creating an atmosphere of a warm, sunny day in the deep south. Some shadows fall on the head and shoulders of the elderly woman. Beside her stands a young, white boy, dressed white with his mouth agape. There seems to be a subtle struggle for dominance in the positioning of the figures. On the left, the child stands upright demanding attention while he

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[64] Wallace, M., *Pictures and Progress*, 24.

faces the camera. On the right, the slumped figure of the elderly woman sits on a cushion. Her seat is beside the child, yet she appears below the child through the angle of composition. The subject is really about the African American woman's societal place though the photographer's perspective. What is lacking in the photograph conveys the elderly woman's portrayal of humanity. She is dressed in plain clothes; she has no jewelry. Her body shrinks into the lack of definition that is her dress, and her head recedes under her hat. Connor capitalizes on the discomfort and humiliation imposed on the elderly woman. This can be seen through aspects of her body language. The woman's posture is slumped, her head tilted down. Her eyes are closed, her hands are in her lap as a signal of resignation to exploitation. The unwilling sitter wishes to not be photographed; she wishes to not be in the moment. Connor recorded the elderly woman's psychological state as closed off. Her dejected posture reflects the lack of hope from being subjected to the awareness of how she is seen rather than her individuality.

In contrast to Mary Britton Connor's portrayal of an elderly African American woman, Richard Samuel Roberts placed his camera on an elderly sitter to be seen as an individual. In the 1920s portrait, *Unidentified* (figure 7), the elderly African American woman is centered in the composition. She sits beside a table, not on a step. Her gaze is fixed on the viewer. Her body is upright, yet relaxed giving the sense of comfort and warmth in with her state of being. Her eyes are peaceful, her face is relaxed. Though she is not smiling, there is an inner joy expressed through how Roberts focused the lighting on her face. Roberts did this by tempering the lights and shadows for softness, rather than producing a harsh contrast. This woman's clothes are clean, and fitted to define her figure. The sleeves emphasize arms that remain strong after many years. She wears jewelry on her ears and around her neck, revealing a part of her personality that enjoys

adornment of beautiful accessories. A shiny purse lays in her lap, between her large, strong hands. This placement shows she has earned her money through work. Her right hand bears a ring, which is a sign of her partnership. These props signify the status of dignity in life through the right to earn money. Roberts' portrait captures the essence of this woman through his ability to establish a rapport with her. Her peaceful demeanor exhibits a person who is comfortable with the space Roberts created. She worked with Roberts to fill this space with her essence through her peaceful look at the camera. Roberts' portrait of the elderly African American woman is a stark contrast to the picture produced by Connor. Roberts was careful to make every portrait into a dignified likeness, yet he also captured the soul of this woman.

How Southern African Americans were viewed, in comparison to how they existed are seen through comparing the two portraits of elderly African American women. Mary Britton Connor came from a rich southern family who had owned slaves during the Civil War. She was an eccentric daughter who involved herself in the arts and reveled in her rebellious female lifestyle.[65] Connor lived in Natchez, Mississippi throughout the Reconstruction era and Jim Crow era. She held ideals of the Confederate nostalgia; what was referred to as the "lost cause myth." This ideology centered around the belief that African Americans were happy about a societal white hierarchy; they were faithful to this structure, and they possessed only a childlike intelligence. Black people were fine with slavery, and they appreciated how white people took care of them.[66] Through the contents of both her writings and photo albums, Connor perpetuated

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[65] Falck, "“Picture Makers,” 120, 121.

[66] Falck, "“Picture Makers,” 121, 122.

this "lost cause mythology."[67] There was no need for Connor to establish a rapport with this sitter; she imposed othered stereotypes on her African American subjects. Connor's world view of the "lost cause myth" presided over the reality that "Mammy" would have possessed any voice. Connor voices her white hierarchy ideals rather than photographing a human being. Her photograph, *Mammy is Mad* (figure 6) exudes this lack of recognition of the individual, whereas Roberts' *Unidentified* (figure 7) African American woman defines a member of the Columbian community.

Dignified Portraits and the Color-Line

Henry Norman was a portrait photographer who also operated in Natchez, Mississippi from the Reconstruction through the early twentieth century. He was the only white portrait photographer who accepted African American clients in the area.[68] Most white photographers refused to accommodate black clients. Historian, Susan T. Falck wrote, "Norman was a photographer who provided the African American middle class of Natchez with the space where they could claim dignity in portraits."[69] She argues for Norman's contribution to the formation of black memory, which was evident in households with portraits of loved ones on their walls.[70] Falck argues that Norman allowed the sitter to achieve a manifestation of individual essence, like Frederick Douglass described. This essence is allegedly seen in Norman's portrait of the wealthy patriarch, *Alex Mazique* (figure 8).[71] Through examining this portrait, however, I argue the

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[67] Falck, ""Picture Makers," 121.

[68] Falck, ""Picture Makers," 105.

[69] Falck, ""Picture Makers," 109.

[70] Falck, ""Picture Makers," 116.

[71] Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 118.

contrary. There is no fierce gaze originating from Alex Mazique; rather his indifferent eyes look beyond the camera.

Alex Mazique was the second patriarch of one of the wealthiest African American families of Natchez, Mississippi.[72] He was the son of August Mazique, a former slave who bought the plantation China Grove during the 1870s.[73] After August's death, Alex took over as the head of household. During his time as the patriarch, Alex held on to China Grove Plantation and acquired the neighboring Oakland Plantation. He kept the properties in pristine condition.[74] Alex could not have achieved the successful maintenance of the plantations without his strong personality. He was adept at both farming and business; he successfully navigated interactions with whites.[75] Being former slaves, Alex and his father, August were both illiterate.[76] This inability to read often made it difficult to conduct legal business. Alex, who used an "X" for his signature, was fortunate to keep land in several instances.[77] Recognizing the value of literacy, Alex required his children and grandchildren to possess an education. The person, Alex Mazique, who was the unique bearded sitter for Henry Norman was explicitly described by his grandson, Eddie. "Alex was a commanding patriarch who had "piercing eyes" that reinforced he was a man of his word."[78]

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[72] Ridlon, *A Black Physician's Struggle*, 12.

[73] Ridlon, *A Black Physician's Struggle*, 7.

[74] Ridlon, *A Black Physician's Struggle*, 12.

[75] Ridlon, *A Black Physician's Struggle*, 14, 17.

[76] Ridlon, *A Black Physician's Struggle*, 12.

[77] Ridlon, *A Black Physician's Struggle*, 14.

[78] Ridlon, *A Black Physician's Struggle*, 12.

Norman's portrait of this well-dressed gentleman is comprised of the popular Victorian era three-quarter pose, and a plain background. Alex Mazique's clothes are fashionable and fitted; the unique beard and neatly cropped hair indicates the likeness of a successful middle class man. His countenance, however, maintains a stone-like mask that stares beyond the camera. His eyes, set behind heavy lids, are dull. The glint of light in Mazique's eyes do not exhibit the spark of the soul that can be observed in portraits of Frederick Douglass. This sitter is static, frozen and solemn. This portrayal does not align with the description of the commanding, dynamic personality made by his family. Where are the "piercing eyes"?[79] Though Norman used clothing and pose to capture a likeness matching Mazique with the black middle class, there lacks that essence or psychological presence due to the reality imposed by the color-line. This time in history did not allow Norman's studio space to provide African Americans the freedom to possess the identity that was true to their reality in portraiture. Frederick Douglass declared, "white people cannot truly create the conditions that allow the black sitter to reveal the soul."[80] Normans' African American clients maintained an opaque mask of protection. Jim Crow conditions were constantly wrought with the threat of violence against African Americans; revealing the self would have held too much risk. Norman's portrait of Alex Mazique indicates this uneasy societal tension.

Florestine Perrault Collins' portrait of the African American soldier*, Ulysses, S. Gore* (figure 9) contrasts Norman's *Alex Mazique* (figure 8). Made in her South Rampart Street studio during the 1930s, the portrait of the young soldier possesses a maskless liveliness. Collins,

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[79] Ridlon, *A Black Physician's Struggle*, 12.

[80] Brown, "Historians and Photography," 8.

seasoned in her practice, captured his excitable nature with her camera. She balanced creative decisions with offering the space of freedom to her sitter. This soldier was a young man with clear eyes that were free to reveal a nervous state. Collins positioned the sitter in a three-quarter pose with a slight diagonal to capture mobile capabilities of the young soldier. She framed his face with high contrast. The light moves vertically on his features, yet contained by sharp shadows on both sides. Collins creative portrayal through this composition uniquely captures this man's lively essence. This portrait allowed the young Ulysses S. Gore to visually manifest his identity, a soldier. According to American philosopher, Cynthia Freeland, good portraits reveal psychological or emotional states of the sitter. To accomplish this, photographers can utilize clues like gesture and lighting to insinuate the sitters' interior state.[81] Collins used a dynamic composition and contrast to create the angst of the soldier. There is disruption in the background through the contrasting forms, which accents the restlessness of the sitter. Collins' treatment of this portrait is opposite of the still, dull background of Norman's *Alex Mazique* (figure 8).

Did this very static portrait make the protective mask more prominent, further hiding Mazique's true person? Though Norman may not have intentionally othered Mazique, it is certain that Southern racial relations shadowed the process of photographer and sitter rapport. Alex Mazique traveled to a white space to get his portrait made. Ulysses S. Gore walked into Collins' studio on South Rampart Street for his portrait; he did not need to mask himself and navigate white space. He did not have to make the psychological change required to enter white space, hence Collins was able to capture his countenance in an authentic state.

Youth Portraits

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[81] Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 100.

Frederick Douglass' view on photographing the African American individual reflected what he called "creating a soul." Portraits that were soul creating allowed the viewer to see a future.[82] Envisioning the future, for Douglass was key to establishing the recognition of humanity and civil rights.[83] Richard Samuel Roberts' portrait of his own son, *Beverly Nash Roberts* (figure 9) compared with Rosalie Gwathmey's *Young Black Girl* (figure 10) signifies a present state that predicts a future identity. Robert's portrait of his son signifies hope through education and independence, whereas Gwathmey's portrait of the African American youth epitomizes lack of opportunity and dependence.

Photographer, Rosalie Gwathmey spent her childhood in Charlotte, North Carolina.[84] Like Connor, Gwathmey used the subject matter for ideological purposes. Her ideas centered around the social justice of civil rights for African American citizens. She expressed disdain for the Southern mythology of African Americans being viewed as sub-human.[85] Gwathmey used her photography skills to compel the viewer to see African Americans as human through using a composition that filled the frame with the sitter's face.[86] The portrait of the *Young Black Girl* (figure 10) illustrates this tactic. Gwathmey's subject is immersed in dark shadows. The girl fixes her gaze beyond the camera. Her eyes point deliberately upward and away from the viewer. With a familiar stone-like countenance, this girl already possesses the protective mask. The close up framing captures the weight of worry on her countenance. Presented as a disheveled figure, this

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[82] Wallace, M., *Pictures and Progress*, 24.

[83] Wallace, M., *Pictures and Progress*, 29.

[84] Corbus, "Picturing Charlotte," 39.

[85] Corbus, "Picturing Charlotte," 40.

[86] Corbus, "Picturing Charlotte," 47.

girl becomes a signifier of poverty's hopelessness. Her posture is slumped and asymmetrical, displaying a lack of self-assuredness. Her clothes are worn, dirty, and not neatly fitted. The floral pattern on her shirt adds to the graininess of over worn clothes. Her shirt collar lays uneven, untidy, and asymmetrically draped around her front, indicating a lack of care. Her sleeves are uneven. Her hair is not combed or freshly styled. The state of the girl's attire and hair may be an indicator of either a lack of access to tools of self-care, or apathy bred from hopelessness. Gwathmey wished to create awareness of African American poverty, but did she, as Corbus suggested, inadvertently feed into stereotypes generated by the southern ideology she was trying to disarm?[87] The lighting Gwathmey used adds weight on the youth's face. It is low key and harsh, casting the mood of a dismal future mired in poverty. Strong, dark shadows that contain another youth behind her provoke the sensation of a the endless dismal state.

What value did Gwathmey place in the photographer-sitter conversation? Like Connor, Gwathmey's intention in creating this portrait centered around how African Americans were perceived. Her placement of the stark shadows, the state of the sitter, and the face in the background is the language of bringing attention to a societal state, rather than "non-othering" the sitter. Though Gwathmey sought to portray the African American community of Charlotte, North Carolina as human, it was also her intention to emphasize the squalor in which they lived. According to Lily Corbus' article, "Picturing Charlotte: An Introduction to Rosalie Gwathmey's Photographs of African Americans in the 1940s," there was resistance from the black community concerning the way she represented them. In reality, the poor did not live in filth; they kept their homes and lawns tidy and efficient. The African American community did not wish to be

[87] Corbus, "Picturing Charlotte," 52.

portrayed as dirty and hopeless. In this, Gwathmey did not accurately portray the black community, hence othering them. As in many other southern cities, a thriving black middle class existed in Charlotte, N.C. until the urban renewal process disrupted the community in the 1960s and 1970s.[88]

The portrait of Richard Samuel Roberts' son, *Beverly Nash Roberts* (figure 11) is a stark contrast to Gwathmey's vision for the future state of African American youth. Roberts' son was in the eighth grade when this portrait was made. Beverly had purchased the suit himself through saving money he earned on his newspaper delivery job. His portrait not only signifies a future of hope and progress, but also the activity of the present. This sitter chose his attire, demonstrating his control over representation. Beverly's gaze is serious, facing the camera, his erect posture portrays self-confidence. His hair is cut in a tidy style; his clothes are clean, pressed, and well fitted to his body. He wears a textured tie, that compliments the smooth vest and a formal jacket. There is a pen in his front pocket, indicating the value placed on education. Beverly would continue his education by attending college, and obtaining a masters degree from New York University. He had a prosperous career as an educator.[89] Roberts highlighted Beverly's face, casting the warm glow that marked many of his portraits. Roberts was careful not to use stark shadows to accent the state of youthfulness on his son's face. With tempered contrast, the darkest shadow is only a deep gray in the right background that serves to lift the sitter forward.

Two different presentations of the future emerge when comparing the youth portraits of Gwathmey and Roberts. Gwathmey's young girl does not self-possess; she is othered because

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[88] Corbus, "Picturing Charlotte," 50, 51.

[89] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 143.

she is portrayed as lacking the hope of the control over her future. Roberts' son, however, was allowed to exude his future desires and hopes through the space of freedom to reveal his essence.

Florestine Perrault Collins and Richard Samuel Roberts engaged themselves in an immersive dialogue with the individuals who sat in their studios. According to American aesthetic philosopher, Richard Shusterman's article, "Photography as Performative Process," a successful portrait is contingent on interactions between the photographer and a willing sitter. To capture a truth that resonates with the sitter, the photographer must gain a trust that allows the sitter to become uninhibited. Shusterman suggests that cultivating the relationship is accomplished through a friendly demeanor, and attention to the sitters' interests.[90] The photographer must help the sitter overcome awkwardness that arises from this request for vulnerability. Photography critic, Roland Barthes (1915-1980) analyzed the experience of feeling awkward about posing and presenting the self. The sitter must receive the photographers' offer of a comfortable space, abandon anxiety, and collect the self in a pose. This is the avenue for exhibiting self-possession.[91] The photographer must know when the sitter has achieved this moment, and take the picture.[92]

Shusterman's description of what happens between the photographer and the sitter offers insight into how Collins and Roberts achieved "non-othering" likenesses of their sitters. Both photographers orchestrated a collaborative negotiation. This required a strong rapport. The photographers began their process of building rapport through advertising their services. They

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[90] Shusterman, "Photography as Performative Process," 69.

[91] Shusterman, "Photography as Performative Process," 70.

[92] Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 97.

followed this through providing a welcoming atmosphere in their studios. During Collins' early career, she accumulated her Creole clients through obtaining lists of families who were preparing to participate in Catholic rights, such as Little Communion and Big Communion.[93] Collins' advertisement in the 1925 *Louisiana Herald*, for example, shows her appealing to the interests of a specific audience.[94]

> "*WHY NOT A PICTURE OF THE CHILD*
>
> *With the First Book Bag, on the Way to*
>
> *School for the First Time*
>
> *Preserve that Wonderful Event*
>
> *BERTRAND'S STUDIO*
>
> *I Like to Make Pictures of Children*"

Collins' advertisement invites her audience to participate in preserving memories of youth milestones. Her words validate important events to families, and ask for the sitters' trust to complete the process of creating memory.

Roberts reached out to his community through advertising frequently in *The Palmetto Leader*. He reminded the Columbian community to get their portraits made for the holidays (figure 5).[95] He was aware of the role his portraits played in the identity and memory of the Columbian community. In the 1920s, Roberts wrote his thoughts on creating portraits. He obligated the community members to have their "likeness" recorded for the purposes memory. In

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[93] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 42.

[94] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 41.

[95] Richard Samuel Roberts, "Yes! Merry Christmas," *Palmetto Leader*, December 12, 1925: Image 6. https://historicnewspapers.sc.edu/lccn/sn93067919/1925-12-19/ed-1/seq-1/\

this pamphlet, Roberts directly reached out, and offered space to construct a "non-othering" representation. After providing his standard of assuring satisfaction, Roberts offered his sitters their choice in posing. The photographer advocated for the importance of having a portrait made. He suggested that it was in reality, a duty that created permanence for the family. He assured the audience of his ability to create successful images. Roberts wrote the following:

"If you are beautiful, we guarantee to make your photographs just like you want them. If you are not beautiful, we guarantee to make you beautiful and yet to retain a true and brilliant likeness of you." -Richard Samuel Roberts[96]

Advertising was not the only measure toward building the rapport needed for "non-othering." Criteria from American art philosopher, Cynthia Freeland's article, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," articulates how Collins and Roberts created successful images of their sitters during the studio visit. They captured the authentic individual while simultaneously creating an aesthetic pictures.[97] Freeland identifies traits good portraits possess: likeness, presence, psychological manifestation, and essence. Likeness refers to the physical qualities that define the individual.[98] All of the photographers in this thesis, except Britton accomplished this portrayal of their sitters. In her photo, *Mammy is Mad* (figure 6), I argue that the elderly African American woman is devoid of distinct qualities that define her. This lack of definition strips identity from a person. Her face and hands merely appear from her ill defined frock. Lynching photographs had this similar ambiguous quality, conveying a disregard for individual

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[96] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,6.*

[97] Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 95.

[98] Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 100, 101.

recognition. This lack of definition is associated with not recognizing identity.[99] Presence centers around the proof of existence.[100] All of the photographers accomplished this at a basic level, because their cameras simply recorded the sitters.

Psychological states and capturing the essence are areas where the white photographers either intentionally or inadvertently othered the African American sitters. Collins and Roberts were naturally more trusted than the white photographers because of the societal atmosphere of the Jim Crow era. As seen in Collins' portrait, *Ulysses S.* Gore (figure 9), race helped the sitters project a more authentic psychological state. Essence, or nature defines the uniqueness of the sitter. In many cases, essence is detected by ones who know the person.[101] Even though we do not know the elderly African American woman in Roberts' *Unidentified* (figure 7), her essence is detected. Roberts combined his technical skill in mastering lighting for portraiture with the friendly nature he solicited in his advertisements to enable the woman to project her unique qualities.

Technical skills were vital to the success of the portraits made by Collins and Roberts. Continuously seeking to improve her practice through experimenting. Collins developed her techniques and her stylistic trait of interacting between the background and sitter. She used her friends as models to practice various poses.[102] Aligning with the strict Creole values, Collins

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[99] Raiford, "Photography and the Practices of Critical Black Memory," 48.

[100] Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 101.

[101] Freeland, "Portraits in Painting and Photography," 135.

[102] Arthé A. Anthony, "Florestine Perrault Collins and the Gendered Politics of Black Portraiture in 1920s New Orleans," *Louisiana History: The Journal of the Louisiana Historical Association* 43, no. 2 (2002): 188. Accessed May 16, 2021. http://www.jstor.org/stable/4233837.

used conservative props and poses that portrayed middle class qualities.[103] Technical skills learned from her time under New Orleans photographer, Jerome Hannafin enabled Collins to produce high quality portraits for her clients.[104] During the latter part of her career, Collins' client base expanded to the African American part of New Orleans. No longer did she exclusively photograph the Creoles; darker skinned African Americans from all walks of life were able to have their portraits made.[105] In the early 1930s, she again used common strategy called "pass as white", because she had light skin, to acquire the South Rampart Street studio.[106] This part of Collins' career centered around walk-ins, due to the diverse, heavy traffic of the port city. Because of the demand of instant photos, Collins capitalized on her skill on making quick finish portraits, in which photos were directly printed directly on the paper.[107] The soldier, Ulysses S. Gore was one of these clients who passed through during this time.[108] Combined with her practice, Collins secured the space where she and her sitter negotiated authentic portraits through her own self-presentation. She constructed her own identity as a middle class woman of color, and dressed like a business woman.[109]

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[103] Anthony, "Florestine Perrault Collins," 174.

[104] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 2.

[105] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 12.

[106] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 87.

[107] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 7.

[108] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 87.

[109] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 98.

Roberts' strength in creating portraits was entrenched in his technical abilities. He used the DeVry .31 camera, which was popular amongst photographers in Hollywood.[110] Glass plate negatives up to 8x10 were preferred by Roberts even though plastic ones were available, because he liked the outcome. These negatives produced photographs that were clean, clear and detailed.[111] In addition to the quality of equipment he used, Roberts produced aesthetic portraits through controlling light. He built a light cabinet for this purpose, and used blue bulbs. Roberts rolled the cabinet to calibrate the placement of light and shadows on his sitters. He was also able to control the softness and harshness of shadows.[112] Roberts was a man of impeccable standards. His son, Gerald, wrote about his father's ingenuity in the studio. For example, Roberts used items such as draperies, screens, and easels to manipulate light and his negatives.[113] Gerald recalled the value Roberts placed on achieving the highest quality in his photographs. He explained that his dad consistently strove to take a perfect picture. There was an ongoing argument between the father and son that Roberts wasted materials in the process of achieving perfection.[114]

Frederick Douglass' theories about the "soul-creating" potential of portraits are realized through Collins' and Roberts' portraits. Juxtaposing the white photographers from the same time and social conditions illustrate how perceptions either suppressed or created opportunities to visually manifest the self. American philosophers, Freeland and Shusterman, explain how

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[110] Roberts, *Our Time, Our Place*, 17.

[111] Roberts, *Our Time, Our Place*, 31.

[112] Roberts, *Our Time, Our Place*, 18.

[113] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 4.

[114] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 8.

photographers captured an authentic portrait of their sitters. Their explanations of this process aids in gaining insight on Collins' and Roberts' approach. Additionally, Collins and Roberts possessed both the social rapport and technical skills in the studio that attracted many individuals. Collins and Roberts were able to arrange their communities' need to visually represent themselves. An authentic, "non-othered" identity begins to emerge through portraits made by Collins and Roberts.

Chapter 2: The Religious and Educational Identity of the Creole and Columbian Communities

Chapter one established that Florestine Perrault Collins (1895-1988) and Richard Samuel Roberts (1880-1936) created "non-othering" portraits, because they were a part of their community. There were examples of how African Americans were a foreign body in portraits made by white photographers during the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries. African American images photographed by whites were either immersed in ideology, or subjected to the effects of the Jim Crow climate. Chapter two explores the freedom Collins and Roberts provided for their communities to construct identity through religious and educational themed portraits. The early part of Collins' career was possible because she specifically made portraits of the Creole's Catholic identity. Many portraits made by Roberts conveyed important religious and education figures in the Columbian community. The Creole community relied on religion as a way to hold on to characteristics that defined them for centuries. The Columbian community used religion to build a self-reliant, educated community.

Religious Identity of the Creole Community

Collins' *Unidentified Graduate and Communicate* (figure 12) portrait was made during the 1920s, before she extended her practice to the broader African American culture. Most of Collins' early income derived from creating portraits of the Catholic rites of passage.[115] The picture, *Unidentified Graduate and Communicate* (figure 12) depicts a seated Creole woman and a standing boy. Both figures are dressed in middle class type of clothing for the early twentieth century. The woman wears a white dress, and the boy is dressed in a white jacket and half-length trousers. He wears white socks and shoes. Both sitters gaze solemnly toward the viewer. The boy holds rosary beads and a missal book in his gloved right hand, and a large white candle, or paschal in his left hand. The woman is seated in an oversized, embossed chair. She holds a scroll in one hand, and part of her dress in the other. This photograph was made to mark the boy's Catholic milestone of Confirmation, or "Big Communion."[116] There are no sources found that identify the woman beside the boy; she may be the mother, sister or teacher. She equally shares space with the boy, indicating a measure of importance in his event.

Catholic identity in Protestant America was part of the Creole's long history that was derived from French and Spanish bloodlines.[117] Catholicism served as a safe space from the derogatory treatment of Jim Crow laws, and allowed a way for people to sustain dignity. Feeling dignified was sourced from the value of having families and religion. The boy in the *Unidentified Graduate and Communicate* (figure 12) portrait is dignified because he is not alone; his upbringing possesses feminine structure. The woman's presence in the photograph indicates a

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[115] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 44.

[116] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 23.

[117] Dubois, S., "Creole Is, Creole Ain't," 238-240.

relationship serious enough for her to be a sitter in this religious event. She is seated, indicating a sense of stability. Collins' religious themed portraits like *Unidentified Graduate and Communicate* (figure 12) recorded the vital aspect of religion that bound Creole families together. Though it is unknown exactly who the woman in the portrait is, the stereotype of the orphaned child is counteracted.[118]

The Creole people were a non-Anglo racially mixed culture that existed in New Orleans since the late seventeenth century. For hundreds of years, they viewed themselves as an elite native group.[119] However, from the Civil War era, onward, the social atmosphere changed. Mixed races were simplified into being identified as "colored." This meant that class status did not matter; there existed a white hierarchy in the south. Through white eyes, the Creole were considered "colored;" therefore, they were not equal citizens.[120] When segregation laws were first introduced, black Creoles sought to cement African American rights through activism and politics. However, as these societal laws became stronger, the Creoles closed themselves off from both black and white communities. Having no other options, and losing their former identity of social status, the Creole community became insular.[121] This was the the social situation in which Florestine Perrault Collins spent her early life, and produced the *Unidentified Graduate and Communicate* (figure 12).

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[118] Anthony, "Florestine Perrault Collins," 178.

[119] Dubois, S., "Creole Is, Creole Ain't," 238, 241.

[120] Dubois, S., "Creole Is, Creole Ain't," 241.

[121] Dubois, S., "Creole Is, Creole Ain't," 223, 244.

Creole families aligned their identity around the Catholic religion. In spite of this attempt to create an ideal Catholic Creole culture, however, there were cracks in the foundation. The Church, itself subscribed to the racist practice of segregation, and a general unfriendliness toward the Creole community. It did not please the Creole congregants to have to sit in the back of the church.[122] Racial tension weakened the Creole and Catholic relationship. Collin's father, like many Creole men, ascribed to the Freemason organization in place of Catholicism. The Masons were tolerant of various religious practices, and actively participated in current matters of the New Orleans African American community. Weakening ties to Catholicism became an issue that perpetuated a shift in the early twentieth century Creole community.[123]

Religious Identity of the Columbian Community

Whereas the Creole community used Catholicism as a mechanism for preservation, the Columbian community used the institution of religion to make progress in their community. Richard Samuel Roberts' portraits of religious leaders reveal diverse groups the Columbian community. They did not follow a generalized perception of black Protestantism as discussed by the historian, Douglas R. Hurt in his book *African American Life in the Rural South, 1900-1950*. Both the Baptist and African Methodist Episcopalian, or AME churches were progressive in the African American struggle for equal footing in American society. Allen University was AME, and Benedict College was Baptist.[124] Roberts' made portraits of women and men who were valued religious leaders.

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[122] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 23.

[123] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 64.

[124] Roberts, *Our Time, Our Place*, 29.

Robert's portrait, *Reverend Sarah H. Smith* (figure 13) from the 1920s showcases a bespectacled, smiling woman wearing a suit with a tie. She gazes at the viewer. A round pin is fixed to the left side of her blazer. A ringed right hand rests over her left hand. Roberts used his lighting techniques to accent the warm glow of her face, at the same time, contrasting dark shadows on her left garment. A Baptist minister from Savannah, Georgia, Reverend Smith, despite dissent, established herself in the Columbian community. She founded a congregation named Bethlehem Baptist Church, which remains active today.[125] Reverend Smith's position was unusual for the Baptist denomination, due to the practice of denying female authority. Reverend Smith's gender and leadership would have been less challenged if she were AME.[126] Hurt's coverage of southern African American religion specified that the AME populated in towns and valued education, whereas the Baptist counterparts remained rural.[127] Smith took on the role as a religious leader, in spite of biased objections.[128] The progressive nature of the Columbian community ultimately accepted the Baptist woman as being the credited the founder of one of its churches.

Roberts was very religious, himself.[129] He photographed a full-length portrait of his own minister, *Reverend Thomas D. Brown* (figure 14). In the portrait, Reverend Brown is centrally

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[125] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 162.

[126] Hurt, *African American Life in the Rural South,* 65. According to Hurt, the Baptist denomination did not believe that women should be in positions of authority. The AME church did not take issue with female leadership. It was more common for AME to have female leaders.

[127] Hurt, *African American Life in the Rural South,* 58.

[128] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 162.

[129] Wilhelmina Roberts Wynn, "Pieces of Days." *Callaloo*, no. 27 (1986): 100. Accessed September 12, 2021. doi:10.2307/2930666

framed with his hands together signifying a gesture of holiness and prayer. Reverend Brown looks directly at the viewer. A hard shadow covers the left side of the reverend's face in contrast to the right, giving a look of suggesting the balance of mercy and severity. This play of shadow affects the eyes; the shadowed eye glistens with the severity, as the other eye is soft and friendly. Formal white robes mark this man as the leader of the St. Luke's Episcopal Church.[130] His robes are loose, giving the appearance of him levitating and drifting forward. The upper two-thirds of Brown's robes are immaculate, however the bottom fabric has wrinkles. Roberts was known to be meticulous with his sitters and photographs.[131] Was the display of the below the knee wrinkles a representation of the priests' prayer duties?

When he moved to South Carolina, Richard Samuel Roberts entered a proactive Columbian community that was interconnected with the eastern part of the United States. The African American community had built progressive and diverse atmosphere. They had worked toward building a strong presence in South Carolina before the Jim Crow era. Columbia was a source of diverse ideas and higher education. Allen University, founded in 1870 by the AME church, and Benedict College, also founded 1870 by the Baptists, were cornerstone higher education institutions that produced teachers, judges, activists, and medical professionals.[132] Protestant branches of Christianity flourished and contributed to the well being of African American families. Churches and schools were commonly utilized to communicate and care for

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[130] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 170.

[131] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 8.

[132] Roberts, *Our Time, Our Place*, 29.

each other's needs. Roberts photographed many individuals who were affiliated with religious and educational institutions whose biographies reflected this.

Roberts' portraits of religious leaders, *Reverend Sarah H. Smith* (figure 13) and *Reverend Thomas D. Brown* (figure 14) exude inviting facial expressions, yet wear the attire that indicates they lead their congregations. This visually aligns with the way Southern African American communities used religion as a foundation to the formation of communities. The Columbian community was an example of Southern African American reaction to the culture of white supremacy. There was a focus on possessing space without white presence. This was because their freedom and mobility was very limited during the Jim Crow era. African Americans could not go certain places, or they had to wait for safe times to perform everyday functions. Travel was difficult; they had to navigate places where they could eat, get petrol or stay the night.[133] There was a curfew; otherwise, they could be physically harmed or worse.[134] One place white people avoided was African American churches; as a result, the institution of religion naturally became a safe space. Churches were the place where African Americans could come together as a community to discuss and plan the present and future without consequence.[135] Southern African American churches identified with two primary branches of Protestantism, the Baptists and Methodists. Many Baptist churches remained in rural areas. Their beliefs centered around a survival mode type of faith. This ideology tended to be more passive in tolerating their unequal status in society. A perspective of enduring the burden of inequality was the African American

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[133] Elizabeth Guffey, "Knowing Their Space," 51.

[134] Elizabeth Guffey, "Knowing Their Space," 47.

[135] Hurt, *African American Life in the Rural South,* 55.

Baptist world view. African Methodist Episcopalian churches, or AME churches, however, took root in urban African American communities. The AME required their leaders to possess an education.[136] Value was placed on religion and education working as a tools for progressing toward achieving civil rights.[137]

Through comparing the1920s religious portraits made by Collins and Roberts, there emerges religious differences between the Creole and Columbian communities. These portraits offer clues on female participation in religious practice. Roberts' portrait of the female Baptist minister, *Reverend Sarah H. Smith* (figure 13) allows the viewer to ponder the Columbian community's views on social contribution. Reverend Smith is dressed in a dark suit and tie; her hair is pulled back. These clothes were considered to be masculine; however, Reverend Smith's suit insinuates leadership over her congregation. Roberts made her portrait in a frontal position, showing her posture to be upright and commanding. Reverend Smith's facial features are inviting with kind, peaceful eyes and a simple smile. In Collin's portrait of the woman and boy, *Unidentified Graduate and Communicate* (figure 12), the seated woman crosses her legs at the ankles. She wears a white dress, and her hair is styled. Her position beside the boy is one of accompanying, rather than overseeing. Her expression is solemn. There is no need for her to be warm and inviting, rather she is there to uphold the importance of the Catholic ritual of Big Communion. Roberts' *Reverend Sarah H. Smith* (figure 13) portrays a role of public leadership, whereas the woman in Collins' *Unidentified Graduate and Communicate* (figure 12) portrait sits beside the participant of the Catholic rite.

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[136] Hurt, *African American Life in the Rural South,* 59, 60.

[137] Hurt, *African American Life in the Rural South,* 58, 59.

Both of Roberts' religious themed portraits from the 1920s, *Reverend Sarah H. Smith* (figure 13) and *Reverend Thomas D. Brown* (figure 14) are visual indications of the religious support in the Columbian community. The facial expressions and dress in the portraits of these religious leaders portray the value of building the trust of their congregations. Collins' *Unidentified Graduate and Communicate* (figure 12) emulates Catholic identity. Collins subjects were participants of religious rites of passage like Big Communion. She did not photograph Catholic Creole leaders organizing for progress in the struggle for civil rights. This may have been partially due to her focus on photographing women and children subjects. The Catholic church, however, did not support African American civil rights. Bishops adhered to segregation practices. The Creole people had to sit in the back of the church.[138] In contrast, Protestant portraits made by Roberts consisted of leaders of congregations who upheld the commitment to invest in the Columbian community. Roberts' portrait of *Reverend Thomas D. Brown* (figure 14) shows the sitter in robes that indicate leadership, however, his hands are placed together indicating his role as a servant to the African American people of Columbia. African American churches were vital for survival an progress. Creole's affiliation with Catholicism were places to claim heritage. Connected to these religious institutions, education was a second influential institution for the identity of Creole and Columbian communities.

Education Identity of the Columbian Community

The *Unidentified Girl graduating from Martinez School* (figure 15) was made during the 1940s, when Collins operated her business on South Rampart Street. The Martinez school was the only kindergarten offered to African American youth in New Orleans during this time. True

[138] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 23.

to the celebratory culture of the city, kindergarten graduation involved pageantry and ceremony.[139] In this photograph, a smiling young girl is dressed in her graduation cap and gown. She stands in full frontal view. The diploma is held over her heart to display the proud moment of achievement, as she finished a significant portion of her early education. Rather than being in the center, Collins framed the girl to the right, asymmetrically. Flowers share the space with he young girl. A vase of large flowers on a wiry table exists slightly behind her, and a chain of blooms are draped over her left shoulder. The flower theme in Collins' composition seems to compete with the purpose of the picture, which is about the youth's milestone. The young girl, illuminated with soft light is slightly overlapping the mid-tone vase and table. The flowers aren't just a prop; they signify of the girls' youthful essence. On her shoulder, the flowers lay under the diploma, preventing it from disappearing in her white gown. These harmonizing flowers visually showcase her important accomplishment. Collins' portrait of this girl's graduation also reveals an ability to frame the sitter through directing the lighting. Shadows of varying intensity are tempered and guided through the composition. The darkest shadows are placed in an "L" shape from the top left to the lower mid-ground to frame the varying sections of grays. Collins also used a range of soft lights in the bottom and the right upper area of the portrait, the brightest illuminates the figure. The tempered the lights and shadows provide an undercurrent of subtle movement while gently illuminating the girl's accomplishment. Collins' skilled practice in making portraits drew the families that made up the Creole and African American communities of New Orleans to her. Her attention to formal elements of portraiture exude the humanity of her sitters. Collins' young sitter shows the pride and value placed in educating at an early age.

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[139] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 90.

Unidentified Girl graduating from Martinez School (figure 15) is a visual testament to instilling value in the children so they will grow up to be productive citizens. The young girl is posing for the capturing of a significant memory. This portrait is a visual artifact of her accomplishment in completing the first milestone in education, graduating from kindergarten, and was made for the familial memory.

After moving her studio to South Rampart Street in the 1930s, Collins further integrated in the broader African American community. New Orleans African American families took their children to have their portraits made to mark important events during childhood.[140] Creole school portraits made by Collins have not been found. There is evidence of her practice of photographing school age children through the 1925 *New Orleans Herald* advertisement, discussed in chapter one.[141] For the purposes of examining her education themed portraits, the *Unidentified Girl graduating from Martinez School* (figure 15) provides an example. For Creole, education was directly connected with their Catholic identity. As segregations laws took hold, Creole families took actions to protect their uniqueness. Identifying as Catholic provided a shield from the demoralizing pain of sending their children to segregated schools, and being labeled as black.[142] Opening private Catholic schools became a way many Creole families avoided segregated public schools. The small schools were held in session at the homes of various women in the community, including Collins' own godmother. Creole children were provided a

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[140] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 7.

[141] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 41.

[142] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 22.

Catholic religious education, as well as foundations in literacy.[143] Part of Collins' education took place in these small home schools. Her education ended after the sixth grade, when she began her work life.[144]

Education Identity of the Columbian Community

Since the Reconstruction years, the Columbian Community invested in higher education opportunities for African American citizens as a means to secure promising future generations and helping the community, itself.[145] *Gerald E. Roberts* (figure 16), Richard Samuel Roberts' son posed for the camera when he completed his degree at Benedict College in 1931.[146] Gerald Roberts stands beside a chair, his hand rests on the top. His position in relation to the chair along with the vertical creases of his robes marks his appearance as a tall man. The tassel on the cap is placed on the left, which means he has already graduated. Roberts used highlights on his son's left side, giving the a sense of a hopeful future. Gerald also looks upward and to his left, signifying attention to the next phase of his life. He maintained a long, successful career as a government law librarian in Washington, D.C.[147] Roberts' portrait of his son, Gerald encases the emblem of dignity. The vertical stature and upward glance of the sitter exudes the importance of transition from completing education to embarking on a future career. Gerald's graduation portrait represents the continuance of the Columbian community's production of educated African American citizens.

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[143] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 22.

[144] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 21.

[145] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 3.

[146] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 150.

[147] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 150.

Preparing youth for a promising life did not only rely on the institutions of higher education. Members of the Columbian community used their professions to invest in the less fortunate. Roberts' portrait of *Celia Dial Saxon* (figure 17) portrays a tired looking elderly woman with graying hair. She wears a simple necklace and a dark top. Her gaze is distant, introspective from the experience a long life. Cecilia Dial Saxon, who was born in 1857, was in her seventies when this 1920s portrait was made. Roberts framed her with a soft background and a gentle light on her face. His use of gentle light honors Celia Dial Saxon's fifty-seven years as an educator who served the Columbian community. She was active in providing opportunities for orphaned and delinquent African American children to gain a path to a better future.[148] Cecilia Dial Saxon was an educator who was concerned for the well being of the community to the extent of leaving no one behind. Her portrait visually identifies the connectedness of the Columbian community. Roberts' portrait of the aged educator shows a tired, worn countenance, but it also emulates the years of both building a strong Columbian community, and battling the unfair treatment of African Americans during the Jim Crow era.

Celia Dial Saxon (figure 17) preserves the likeness of an individual who represents the memory of how the Columbian community thrived during a violent time for Southern African Americans. Since the pre-Civil War era, white supremacy culture in the South aggressively attempted to withhold opportunities for African Americans to learn how to read and write.[149] As the Jim Crow laws took hold, African Americans faced segregation in schools, and they could

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[148] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 141.

[149] La'Neice M. Littleton, "High Hope and Fixed Purpose: Frederick Douglass and the Talented Tenth on the American Plantation." *Phylon (1960-)* 51, no. 1 (2014): 102–14. http://www.jstor.org/stable/43199124.

only receive a public education up to the fifth grade.[150] African Americans knew the value of education as a tool to form their place in society. Communities like Columbia focused much of their organized energy on establishing universities. Allen University and Benedict were established in Columbia, S.C. during Reconstruction.[151] Circumstances such as this compelled urban African American communities to build their own hospitals. Programs, such as education, medical, religious training offered by these institutions in Columbia, as well. These higher education programs became necessary for the well being of these communities.

Portraits affiliated with education made by Collins were mostly centered around early childhood years, like the *Unidentified Girl graduating from Martinez School* (figure 15). Through capturing the childhood subjects' accomplishments, Collins photographed a part of New Orleans African American education that would have otherwise been overlooked. Author P. Bedou (1880-1966), Collins' contemporary, photographed more prominent public figures during this time.[152] The New Orleans Creole and African American communities were not centered around higher education to the extent of the Columbian community. Dillard University did not open until 1935. Collins offered her services to the higher education students through advertisement; however, there are no photographs found of the leaders in higher education made by her.[153] Roberts' portraits of educational figures mainly focused on young adult graduates and

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[150] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 21.

[151] Roberts, *Our Time, Our Place*, 27.

[152] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 66,67.

[153] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 96.

leaders who represented foundational elements of Columbia's role in African American education.

Chapter 3: Portraits as Visual Representations of Identity

Chapter one establishes how Florestine Perrault Collins (1895-1988) and Richard Samuel Roberts (1880-1936) created an environment for making "non-othering" portraits. Chapter two analyzed the impact of "non-othering" through examining how various members affiliated with religious and educational institutions reflected non-white influenced identity. Chapter three examines portraits made by Collins and Roberts to discuss the unique, identity each community claimed. This approach is derived from photography critic, Roland Barthes (1915-1980), who argued for considering more than one photograph to cultivate meaning.[154] Literary scholar, Elizabeth Abel adds to Barthes' argument. She states that photographs can capture phenomenon around the sitter in her book, *Sign of the Times: Visual Politics of Jim Crow*.[155] Analyzing photographs as integrated groups result in a broader insight into who the Creole and Columbians were between the 1920 and 1940s.[156] Drawing attention to Collins' and Roberts' representation of their community members questions broad perceptions of a hopeless, impoverished population.

Collins' Portraits

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[154] Taminiaux. *The Paradox of Photography*, 100.

[155] Abel, *Signs of the Times,* 78.

[156] Taminiaux. *The Paradox of Photography*, 100.

Manuella Adams Robert (figure 18), a 1930s portrait made by Collins depicts a well-dressed young woman filling a chair. She poses in the classic three-quarter view, staring beyond the viewer with a flawless face. This woman, Manuella Adams Robert (1886-1969) wears a dark, stylish, round hat accompanied by a fur coat, and dark knee-length dress. Manuella's legs are crossed at the ankles, she wears black shoes. Her feet rest on a floral carpet. She holds a purse with her left hand. Her wedding ring on her left finger is prominent. The gray background Collins used frames the shadows on the sitters' right. Background shadows sharpen the sitters' face; it accents the luster of the hat, buttons, edge of the purse and ring. The rug below her feet is light, juxtaposing the range of shadows and reinforcing the softness of her face, hands and legs. The overall effect of this portrait reveals an impeccably dressed woman who looks well off, financially.

The story of this sitter, Manuella Adams Robert, reflects what the New Orleans Creole community was doing to adjust to twentieth century life. Before Collins' generation, the Creole culture abided by the Catholic position of discouraging women from working outside the home. In reality, this ideal could not be sustained. If the husbands left or passed away, the women and children had no means to economically survive. Manuella Robert's husband died; she took employment as a maid for a hotel.[157] Collins' portrait of this sitter portrays a well-dressed, confident woman who provided for herself. She is no longer bound to the domestic sphere, rather she is part of a growing public workforce of Creole women. Manuela Robert's ringed finger acknowledges her marriage; however, the purse she holds reminds the viewer of her financial independence.

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[157] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 26,27.

Like Manuela Robert, Collins went from the confinement of a non-public life to being involved with the African American society of New Orleans. Collins married Herbert Collins in 1928, after leaving an authoritarian first husband. At this point, Collins participated in public life.[158] Being liberated from restrictions, she became more active in the African American community of New Orleans. She participated in the N.A.A.C.P. and the Cultural Congregational Church.[159] In 1934, Collins moved her studio to the African American section of South Rampart Street.[160] As a result, her subjects in portraiture expanded to include African Americans and individuals in their Mardi Gras attire.

In the early 1940s, Collins photographed her friend, *Bea Duncan* (figure 19) in her Mardi Gras costume. Seated at a three-quarter pose with a natural smile on her face, Duncan holds a Spanish fan.[161] Her arm bears a thick bracelet that seems to join itself with the flowers on the fan. Her hair is styled to show off her large earrings that compliment her robust figure and formal dress. The interaction among Duncan's fresh smile, lively eyes, and large jewelry provide the viewer with a glimpse of New Orleans' celebratory essence. Collins framed her sitter with a smoky background that ranges from soft to mid-tone grays. The landscape on the Spanish fan appears crisp in contrast to the background, making it seem to disjoin from the picture space. Collin's portrait of Duncan is ideal, reminiscent of the city-wide identity of continuing the European carnival tradition through the annual celebration of Mardi Gras, despite the segregated

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[158] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 76,78.

[159] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 9.

[160] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 78.

[161] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 102.

conditions. For the African American and Creole communities of New Orleans, Mardi Gras was celebrated through costume balls and dances. They were not allowed to participate in the parades.[162] Duncan's portrait conveys the value of keeping the festive traditions that identify the city of New Orleans, itself.

Grouping Collins' portraits of Creole sitters shows the interplay between inner Creole life and the broader social African American community that occurred in the early twentieth century. The *Unidentified Communicate and Graduate* (figure 12) shows the interior life of Creole culture. The portrait of *Manuella Adams Robert* (figure 18) reflects the breaking apart of Catholic values through women integrating themselves in society. *Bea Duncan* (figure 19) represents the identity within the larger New Orleans culture. The New Orleans Creoles were not able to remain insular as modern U.S. society shaped their culture throughout the twentieth century. Another change the Creole community experienced was migration. Many Creole people moved either to the North or California in order to seek better opportunities. Collins, herself moved to California twice. The second time, 1949, she permanently closed her studio, thus closing her role in preserving a chapter of Creole history through the making of her portraits. Collins returned to New Orleans to enjoy to enjoy her final days with surviving friends and family in 1975.[163]

Roberts' Portraits

Richard Samuel Roberts' portraits preserve the memory of a community that was built during Reconstruction, only to be made stronger during the Jim Crow era. Roberts' work

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[162] Anthony. *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 101.

[163] Anthony, *Picturing Black New Orleans*, 105, 108.

captures almost twenty year span from 1920 to 1936. He photographed a Columbian community that used the institutions of religion and education to build their city. These institutions were interconnected with a strong civil rights activism. One of the many activists on whom Roberts photographed was *Modjeska Monteith* (figure 20) in the early 1920s.[164] A woman sits in a profile pose, her hands are propped on a book. She is dressed in simple light attire with a pearl necklace. She wears a wedding ring on her left hand. In her portrait, Roberts used strong, dark shadows from the left to frame the face. The background is blurred into a gray mass, which brings attention to crisp vertical and horizontal texture of the fold of her sleeve. Modjeska Monteith's portrait exudes an air of seriousness through the pointed shadow that covers her face. Why did Roberts decide to do this with her portrait? Was it because of her actions being the embodiment of activism in the Columbian community? Was it simply something he saw in a photography magazine that intrigued him to try? Roberts practiced self-educating through reading photography magazines.[165] Though the motive is not clear, the result was the production of an aesthetically strong portrait. Roberts demonstrated his ability to use technical skills in lighting and depth of field, inviting the viewer's eye to gather many aesthetic details. For example, the soft vertical shadow that divides the arm contrasts highlights of the folds. This textural effects draws attention to the crisp folds of Monteith's sleeve. These shadows pause and spill over the horizontal texture at her elbow.

Modjeska Monteith, like many Columbians, lived to help her community. She was a math teacher at Booker T. Washington School, and later an activist for African American civil rights in

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[164] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 144.

[165] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 4.

South Carolina.[166] Roberts' mastery of controlling lights and shadows on Monteith's face, is reminiscent of the weight and hope she carried in advocating for African American rights. Monteith's impact on the community was lasting. Her house is currently on the National Register of Historic Places.[167]

Roberts' portraits of religious leaders, like *Reverend Sarah H. Smith* (figure 13) and *Reverend Thomas D. Brown* (figure 14) portrays figures that emulated Columbia's religious diversity. The Baptist minister, Reverend Smith wears a suit. Reverend Brown, an Episcopalian priest, is clad in the white robes of his denomination. Though they differed theologically, both ministers served the Columbian community. Roberts did not favor dogmatic differences when making portraits. Reverend Smith and Reverend Brown are representative of welcoming aspects of their denomination. Roberts accomplished this through having these sitters look directly at the viewer. He used his skills to create a sculptural effect. He manipulated light and modeled their faces with deep shadows and highlights. Roberts made their expressions inviting while retaining authority. Despite the many Protestant denominations in Columbia, their common goal existed to improve the state of the community. Both the AME and Baptists were involved in the development of African American society in Columbia. During the Reconstruction era, these religious groups were responsible for establishing major higher education institutions. Roberts' Columbian community functioned in their present while cultivating hope for their future generations.

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[166] Johnson, T., *A True Likeness,* 144.

[167] Stacy Richey and Dr. Lydia Brandt, *Columbia Downtown Historic Resource* Survey. (Columbia, South Carolina): 78 https://dc.statelibrary.sc.gov/bitstream/handle/10827/39773/DAH_Downton_Historic_Resource_Survey_Report_2020-09-28.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y,

Youthful portraits of Roberts' sons, *Beverly Nash Roberts* (figure 11) and *Gerald E. Roberts* (figure 16) represents the continuance of productive African American citizens of the United States of America. Roberts accomplished this through the same meticulous nature that compelled him to master the element of using light in portraiture. He arranged shadows to frame his young, well-dressed sitters to exude hope through professionalism and intelligence. Gerald's pose of looking off to his left, makes this portrait an ideal representation that echoed the value Columbia placed on the connection between education and future hope.

Roberts' portraits of *Celia Dial Saxon* (figure 17) and the *Unidentified Elderly woman* (figure 7) preserve the historical experiences from which the Columbian African American community arose. These women were alive during the early part of the formation of this community; their experiences echo how the community was made through the work and lives of individuals. Roberts used his mastery of subtle lighting to show reverence for elderly sitters. His picture of the *Unidentified Elderly Woman* (figure 7)*,* for example, emits the warm glow of hope through adversities in life. He captured the wear of care and taking responsibility of the future generations in the face of *Celia D. Saxon* (figure 17). Their images compel the viewer to contemplate the struggle to transform from a state of survival to thriving for the Columbian community.

Roberts' portraits convey the Columbian community's identity traits. This was a connected community that was also diverse. They were defiant of racial and gender norms, and took care of each other. Roberts indiscriminately photographed African American women and men who served their community. Being surrounded by the activity of the Columbian community, Roberts was aware of the importance his portraits were in relation to true identity

construction. By his untimely death from pneumonia in 1936, Richard Samuel Roberts had used his life as a photographer to preserve an authentic portrayal of the African American Columbians from the Jim Crow era for the future members of his community to remember. Much effort has been made to preserve the African American community of Columbia, South Carolina. Richard Samuel Roberts' portraits are an integral part of preserving the memory of this history. Columbia, South Carolina invested in preserving heritage sites, including manyAfrican American buildings from Roberts' time. In the 2020 Columbia Downtown Historic Resource Survey, Wayne Street, including Roberts' house is among marked sites that are recommended for protection.[168]

Collins' portraits captured memories that pointed to the identity of the Creole community during the early twentieth century. Catholic observances, life event recognitions, and Mardi Gras celebrations were Collins' primary subjects. Her sitters also projected the cultural shift that was being experienced, as the Creole community integrated into the broader African American culture. Similarly, Roberts' portraits reflected the identity of his community. The African American individuals discussed represent a diverse and independent community. Roberts' work reflects that age and gender were not criteria for contributing to the community.

Conclusion

My thesis explores how Florestine Perrault Collins and Richard Samuel Roberts created "non-othering" portraits of individuals in the New Orleans and Columbia, South Carolina communities, respectively. Frederick Douglass' statement resonates with this analysis. He said,

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[168] Richey, S., *Columbia Downtown Historic Resource Survey,* 165,173.

"a white photographer wouldn't be able to photograph African Americans sitters because there would be no room for fairness." African Americans during the Jim Crow era were an othered, or an alienated group of people. Collins and Roberts utilized their aesthetic preferences, skills in portrait making, and strong rapport with sitters. This resulted in the condition of fairness Douglass alluded to in his lectures about photography. The sitters had no need to contend with consequences associated with the color-line, making it possible for "non-othering" representation to occur. My analysis of the portraits made by Collins and Roberts challenges the truthfulness of othered portrayal. I explore how the portraits represent a more authentic identity of these communities during the Jim Crow era. The "non-othering" representation provides the opportunity to view Collins' and Roberts' portraits from the perspective of their communities.

I connect "non-othering" with aesthetic qualities in Collins' and Roberts' work through my analysis of their works. These photographers incorporated expressive elements, and made aesthetic choices in the production of their work. Collins used props and lighting to interact with the sitter in a way that seemed like they were possessing a behavior of their own. Roberts' mastery of creating a modeling effect with lighting encapsulated an aura of himself and the Jim Crow era Columbia community. Both photographers possessed a passion for their practices and their communities. I find that their aesthetic preferences intersected with their relationship with their communities made the "non-othering" of Collins' and Roberts' sitters legible.

My approach to writing about Collins and Roberts contributes the decolonization of the art history canon through drawing attention to artists who deserve merit. My work contributes to the right of all influential artists to be included in scholarship. Collins and Roberts made work that influences the way their communities can be perceived. My thesis on Collins and Roberts

contributes to both the aesthetic and social context of the portraits they made. The formal analysis draws attention to the aesthetic attributes of the portraits they produced. My use of the new historicist methodology scrutinizes the culture in which Collins' and Roberts' photographs were made. I challenge a stagnant idea that the Jim Crow era's African American visual culture has a primary purpose to counteract negative racial stereotypes. Counteracting remains relational to othering; the process of "non-othering" continues through being curious about what these communities were actually like. What were their perceptions about themselves? My thesis about Collins and Roberts and their work feeds this curiosity. Both of these photographers are understudied. There are only a few works of scholarship that draw attention to Collins' and Roberts' life and the value of their work. I have found no scholarship that discusses the aesthetic qualities of the portraits they made. My thesis adds to a much needed library of scholarship about Southern African American visual art and culture. The methods of formalism and new historicism is useful in studying these artists. My study of Collins and Roberts is an important piece in the scaffolding of a broader area of Southern African American art history. Stylistic traits amongst Collins, Roberts and other African American photographers who were operating during the Jim Crow era can be compared.

If it weren't for the portraits Collins and Roberts produced, would we have access to a "non-othered" visual way of interacting with the perspectives of the Creole and Columbian communities of the Jim Crow era? Collins and Roberts were close to not being known; they could again become obscured if more scholarship about them is not produced. My thesis invites future scholarship to happen, about the aesthetic qualities of the portraits they produced. Much of Collins' work is not available due to the destruction of Hurricane Katrina. Many of the portraits

she made may still be hidden in old Creole and African American family albums. Hopefully, more of her photographs will emerge in the future. That being stated, further study about her work should continue with the photographs that are available. More scholarship about Richard Samuel Roberts is possible and probable. Fortunately, African American cultural heritage and preservation is important to the community of Columbia, South Carolina. The historic museum and university published literature about Roberts, including his biography and a selection of his photographs. Columbia's historic preservation association also preserved his house on Washington Street. The large cache of glass plate negatives discovered in Robert's home is mostly accessible for further study the aesthetic uniqueness of Richard Samuel Roberts' portraits.

Florestine Perrault Collins and Richard Samuel Roberts "non-othered" the individuals of their communities from advertisements to developed portraits. Their tentative nature, the production of quality of portraits and the treatment of their sitters manifested into authentic portraits that reveal what the communities of New Orleans, Louisiana and Columbia, South Carolina were like.

Figures

Figure 1. Florestine Perrault Bertrand, *Self-Portrait*, early 1920s, photograph, courtesy of private ownership, unknown location

Figure 2. Florestine Perrault Collins, *Arth'e C. Perrault,* 1936, photograph, Courtesy of Arthe' Perrault Anthony, location unknown.

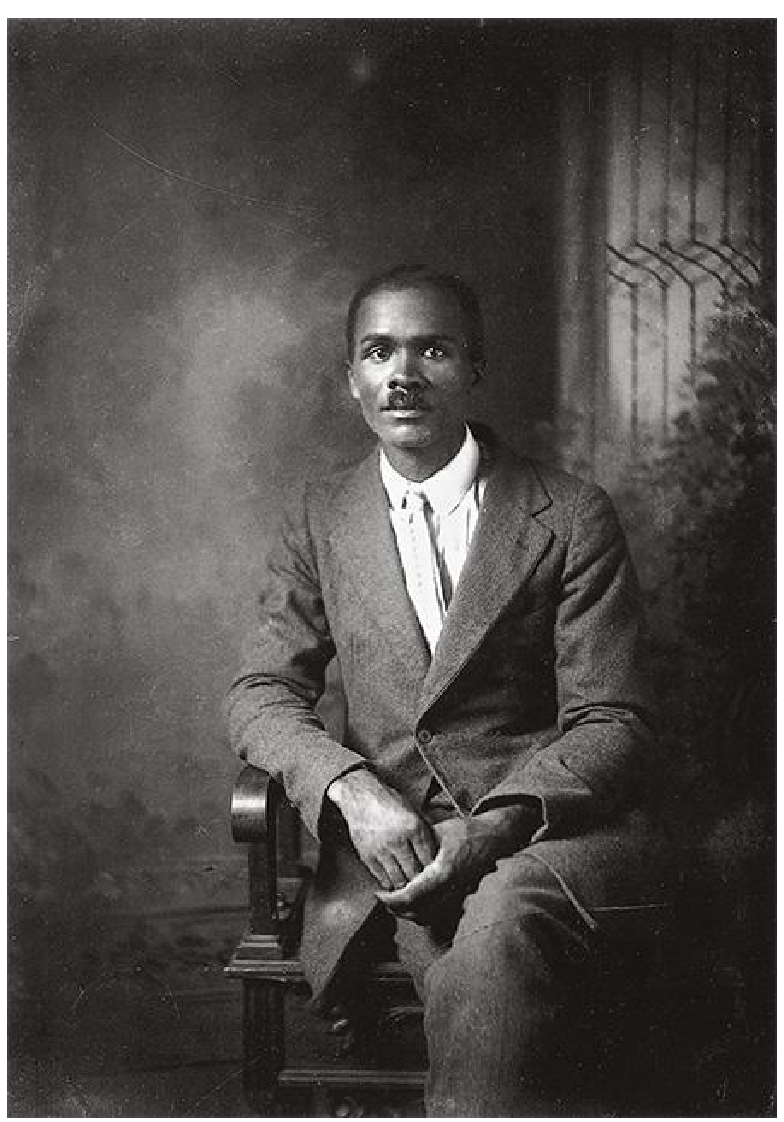
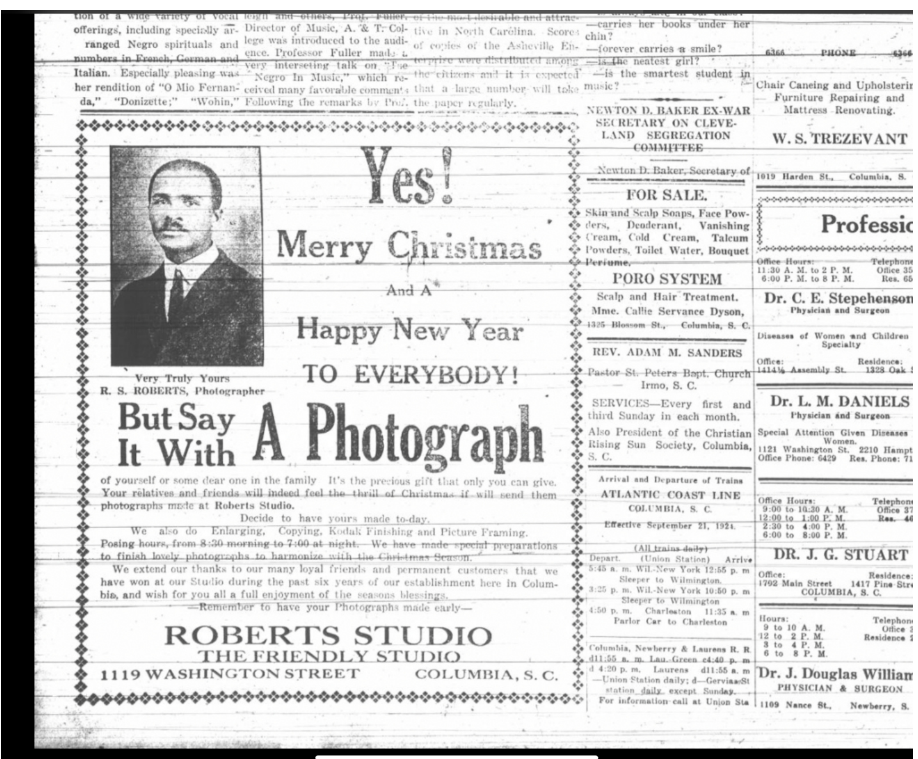


Figure 3. Richard Samuel Roberts, *Self Portrait,* 1920s, photograph, Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C.

Figure 4. Richard Samuel Roberts, *Eva Prioleau Trezevant*, 1927, Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C.



offerings, including specially arranged Negro spirituals and numbers in French, German and Italian. Especially pleasing was her rendition of "O Mio Fernanda," "Donizette;" "Wohin,"

Director of Music, A. & T. College was introduced to the audience. Professor Fuller made a very interseting talk on "The Negro In Music," which received many favorable comments Following the remarks by Prof.

tive in North Carolina. Scores of copies of the Asheville Enterprise were distributed among the citizens and it is expected that a large number will take the paper regularly.

Yes!

Merry Christmas

And A

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Figure 5. Richard Samuel Roberts,"*Yes! Merry Christmas*," *Palmetto Leader*, December 12, 1925, University of South Carolina Library, S.C.

Figure 6. Mary Britton Connor, *Mammy is Mad*, n.d., Mary Britton Connor Album, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, L.A.

Figure 7. Richard Samuel Roberts, *Unidentified,* 1920s, photograph, Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C.

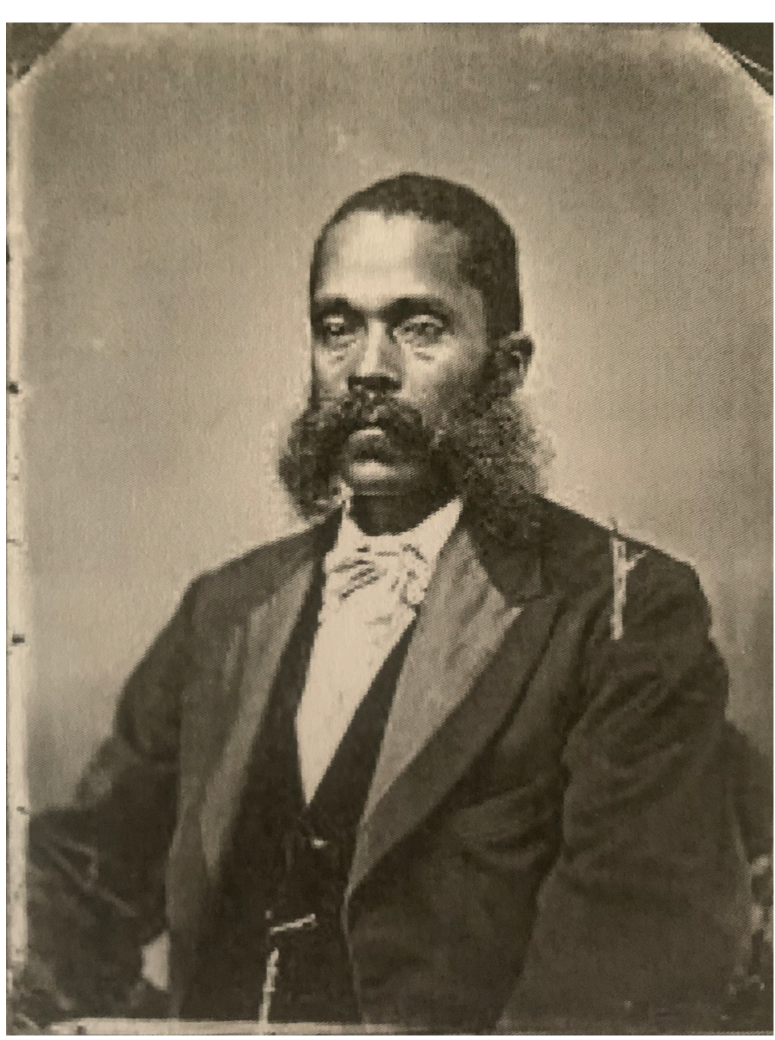

Figure 8. Henry Norman, *Alex Mazique,* ca 1880, Hill Memorial Library, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, L.A.

Figure 9. Florestine Perrault Collins, *Ulysses S. Gore,*1942, photograph, courtesy of Ulysses S. Gore, unknown location.

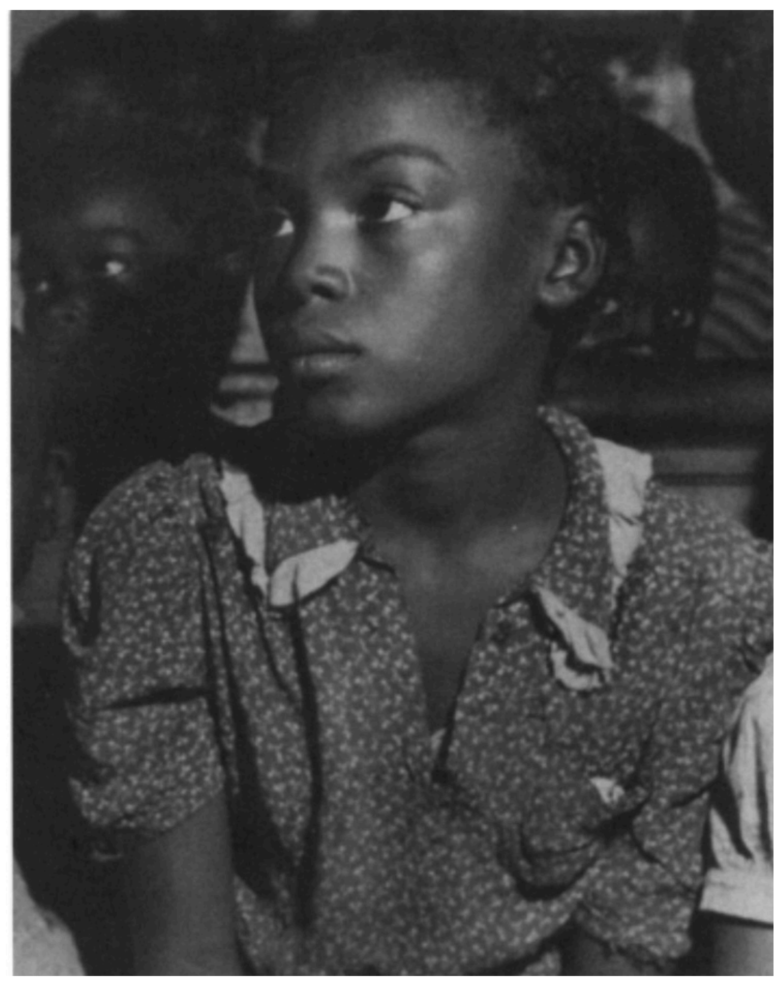

Figure 10. Rosalie Gwathmey, *Young Black Girl,Charlotte, NC,* 1947, silver gelatin print, New York Public Library, New York, N.Y.

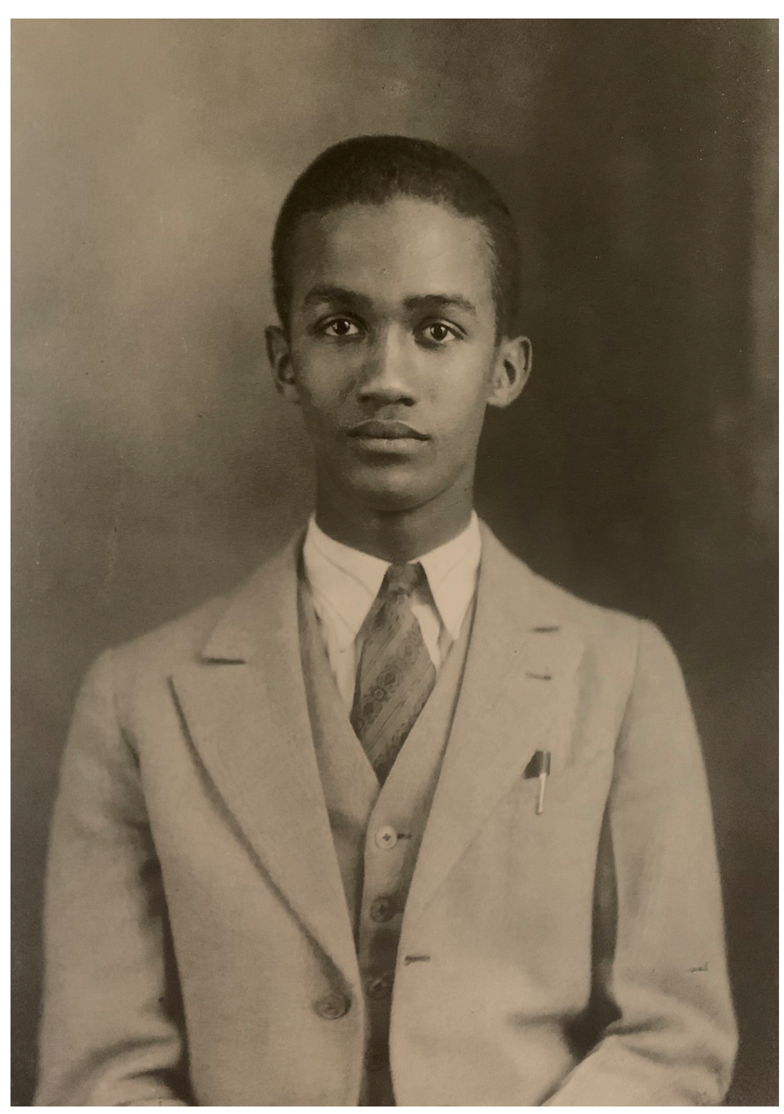

Figure 11. Richard Samuel Roberts, *Beverly Nash Roberts,* 1925, photograph, Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C.

Figure 12. Florestine Perrault Collins, *Unidentified Graduate and Communicate,* early 1920s, Historic New Orleans Collection, New Orleans, L.A.

Figure 13. Richard Samuel Roberts, *Reverend Sarah H. Smith,* 1920s, photograph, Columbia Museum of Art. Columbia, S.C.

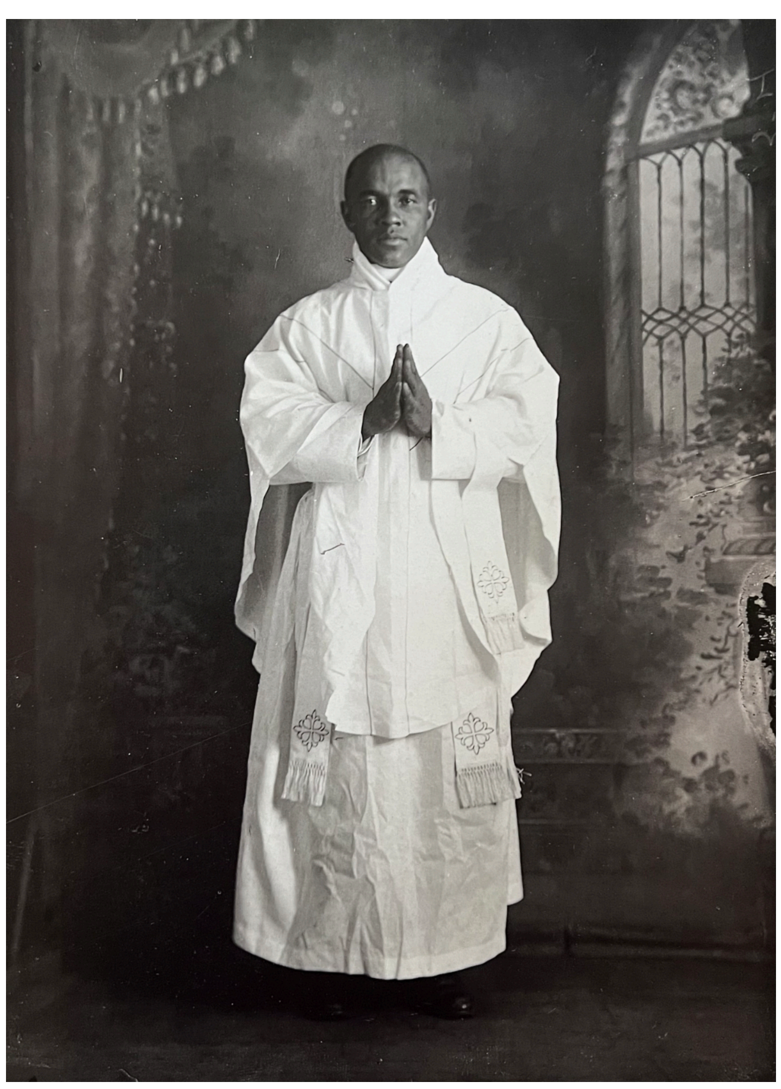

Figure 14: Richard Samuel Roberts, *Reverend Thomas H. Brown,* 1926, photograph, Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C.

Figure 15. Florestine Perrault Collins, *Unidentified Girl Graduating from Saint Martinez School,* 1940s, courtesy of Numa Martinez, unknown location.

Figure 16. Richard Samuel Roberts, *Gerald E. Roberts,* 1931, photograph, Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C.

Figure 17. Richard Samuel Roberts, *Celia Dial Saxon,*1920s*,* photograph, Columbia Museum of Art, Columbia, S.C.

Figure 18. Florestine Perrault Collins, *Manuella Adams Robert,* early 1930s, photograph, courtesy of private ownership, unknown location.

Figure 19. Florestine Perrault Collins, *Bea Duncan,* photograph, early 1940s, courtesy of private ownership, unknown location.

Figure 20. Richard Samuel Roberts, *Modjeska Monteith,* 1923, photograph, Columbia Art Museum, Columbia, S.C.

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