BLACK BODIES

WHITE GOLD

Art, Cotton, and Commerce in the Atlantic World

ANNA ARABINDAN-KESSON

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For Thatha

Contents

Acknowledgments

My book tells a story about the formation of Blackness, primarily in the United States, and so, I am indebted to the Indigenous owners of the land on which the imperial project of the United States of America is being formed. As an immigrant settler I acknowledge that I live, write, research, and teach on unceded lands. In Princeton the land on which I live and work is part of the homeland and traditional territory of the Lenape people. I pay respect to Lenape peoples—past, present, and future—and to their continuing presence in the homeland and throughout the Lenape diaspora. (I adapted this statement from *Many Voices, One Future: An Inclusive Princeton* [https://inclusive.princeton.edu/node/1531].)

I was able to write this book because of the generosity, labor, and love of others. And this is what I want acknowledge here.

My art historical journey started years ago when I studied nursing. Under the guidance of lecturers at the Manukau Institute of Technology in Auckland I first learned how to observe and first understood how vision mediates the production of knowledge. It was as a nurse that I first grappled with critical theories of race, decolonization, and feminism and began to make connections between community, individual experience, and structural conditions. This circuitous route to the academy gave me the grounding, and the eyes, for what I now do.

For their mentorship and teaching I thank my undergraduate professors at the University of Western Australia, especially Clarissa Ball, Ethan Blue, and Rob Stewart. Their belief in me gave me the grounding to move forward into this field, and I could not do without their supportive friendship now. At Yale, where I completed my doctorate in African American Studies and the History of Art, I was privileged to be advised by the dream team of professors Timothy Barringer and Hazel Carby. Not only did they put up with and allow me to work through my academic neurosis, they modeled an intellectual generosity, rigor, and empathy that will always inspire me. I am grateful to call them friends.

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to my body. Ultimately, though, this book owes everything to Hugh Kesson. He is my heart. His care is what I aspire to emulate; his voice is the one I listen out for amid the noise. For twenty years we have walked together, and not once has he ever stopped believing that this intellectual work is important. Thank you for putting your career on hold to support mine and care for our children. As my love, my friend, and my co-parent, your labor, your generosity, your patience, above anyone's, has sustained this project. I cannot imagine a life better shared, and although it is not much recompense, this book is always, and only, for you.

Illustrations

Introduction

Threads of Empire

Two hands crossed at the wrists. Two fists full of cotton. A blurred thicket of stalks. These are the elements of Hank Willis Thomas's (b. 1976) 2014 print *Black Hands, White Cotton* (figure Intro.1). This artwork's subject, Black hands holding white cotton, immediately recalls a vast image bank that narrates the long, intertwined history of race and labor in the making of the Atlantic world. As if to emphasize this entanglement, the image has been cropped and pixelated to specifically draw our attention to the intimacies of fiber and flesh that literally expand its geographies. Lined skin on each hand is smoothed out so that we notice each ridge, crease, and fold. Veins form deep rivulets that straighten and then snake across the back of the laborer's hand, joining wrist to finger. The vein ends where the side of the finger touches the cotton fiber, and its serpentine path beneath the skin recalls the carefully demarcated waterways, along which cotton bales flowed, that spread out across maps of the United States.

The right palm faces down, and between the edges of thumb and forefinger cotton oozes out as if squeezed from the tightly closed palm. Its rounded edges follow the curve of the join between thumb and finger while its surface glistens like the rounded, worn-smooth nub of the worker's knuckle. By contrast, the open palm of the left hand is almost entirely covered by the tufts of cotton it holds. They bloom out and gather around the edges of the palm. The view we have leaves the bent fingers, crouching around the tufts of cot-

FIGURE INTRO.1 · Hank Willis Thomas (b. 1976), *Black Hands, White Cotton*, 2014. Screen print and Carborundum on paper, 87.6 × 87.3 cm (34½ × 34⅜ in.). © Hank Willis Thomas. Courtesy of the artist and Jack Shainman Gallery, New York.

ton, in shadow so that they resemble the sharp lobes of the cotton plant's calyx from which the boll grows.

The original photograph was printed on the record sleeve for a song of the same name, by a 1970s Memphis band called Butterscotch Caboose. Reworked by Thomas into a Carborundum print, this artwork centralizes the history of slavery and its relationship to the cotton trade as it developed across the Atlantic. As a manipulator of archival images, Thomas has always been interested in the currency of visual forms, in terms of how they are constructed and of how these constructions circulate to create meaning. In an image like this, historical meaning and contemporary legacies coincide. It is impossible to look and not see plantations and back-breaking labor, not see

centuries of racial exploitation and oppression, not see this history repeated in the carceral system, in police brutality, in the economic and legislative marginalization of African Americans. While this history remains central to how the United States was created, and how it continues to function, the refusal to acknowledge its ongoing implications creates the sense that it is a history hidden in plain sight.

The print itself shows us only two things: hands and cotton. Because the hands are disconnected from the rest of the body, we inevitably come to focus on the cotton itself and its relationship to fingers, a relationship created through the contrasts of color. We notice the difference between focus and abstraction, the space between backdrop and foreground, the movement between surface and depth. The intensity of close looking in this print consistently returns us to the cotton itself, a reflexive gesture by Thomas that draws attention to the way cotton calls up images, memories, and meanings that are not, necessarily, right in front of us.

It is both the visual ubiquity of cotton, as a material whose history frames the social relations that guide our present, and its material connotations that Thomas foregrounds here.[1] Explaining this another way, the artist Leonardo Drew, whose sculptures are often formed using found, and symbolic, materials—cotton, rust, paper—more explicitly states that "cotton is a material with memory."[2] As an object redolent with associations both political and cultural, cotton continues to exist in the present as an artifact charged with the traces of labor under slavery, the hardships of southern agriculture, the colonial expansion of Britain, and the endurance of Black Americans. In this context Thomas's photograph seems to ask, How do memories accumulate in the material? And how have these material memories framed ways of seeing? In examining the representation of cotton in the long nineteenth century, my book sets out to explore some of these connections between materiality, memory, and ways of seeing. Contemporary artists including Hank Willis Thomas, Lubaina Himid (b. 1954), Yinka Shonibare CBE (b. 1962), and Leonardo Drew (b. 1961), who use and represent cotton in their artworks, first piqued my interest in the subject, and they have shaped my intellectual engagement with these questions. Indeed, their work has continually reminded me of the importance these associations hold not only historically but also in our present moment.

In British artist Lubaina Himid's large installation created in 2002, *Cotton .com* (figures Intro.2 and Intro.3), cotton fabric propels the component works' meaning. She draws on the rhythmic repetition of the grid to establish a dynamic relationship between the places cotton moved. Arranging patterned, black-and-white paintings that simulate textiles along one wall with

FIGURE INTRO.2

Lubaina Himid (b. 1954), *Cotton.com* (detail), 2002. Acrylic on canvas and brass strips. *Fabrications*, installation view (2002), CUBE (Center for Urban Built Environment) Gallery, Manchester. Courtesy of the artist. Image courtesy of Denise Swanson.

FIGURE INTRO.3

Lubaina Himid (b. 1954), *Cotton.com*, 2002. Brass strips, 10 × 200 × 0.2 cm (4 × 78¾ × 1/16 in.). *Lubaina Himid: Navigation Charts*, installation view (2017), © Spike Island, Bristol. Courtesy of the artist and Hollybush Gardens, Arts Council Collection. Photograph by Stuart Whipps.

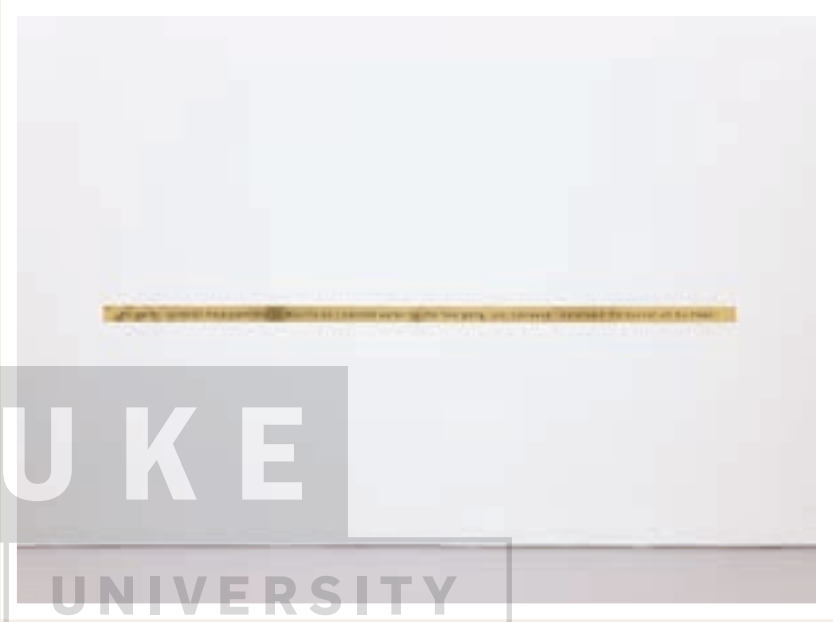

FIGURE INTRO.4
Yinka Shonibare (b. 1962), *Scramble for Africa*, 2003. 14 life-size fiberglass mannequins, 14 chairs, table, Dutch wax-printed cotton. The Pinnell Collection, Dallas, TX.

a commemorative text on the other, Himid traces the paradoxes of cotton's circulation by engaging with its material implications. Drawing on the history that connected Manchester factory workers with the lives of enslaved cotton pickers in the American South, she foregrounds the experiences of these workers through their interaction with the commodity. The implications of these interactions and connections for shaping constructions of identity, meanings of consumption, experiences of labor, and modes of engagement—especially in the later nineteenth century—become particularly significant in the witty installations and "African" fabrics of Yinka Shonibare. In *Scramble for Africa* (figure Intro.4), produced in 2003, he draws on the history of European (and American) constructions—and divisions—of Africa as a site of speculation. But his work has a broader significance in its material conditions. Using fabric with complicated and circuitous origins, his work highlights the historically market-driven contexts of cotton's circulation, the complex moments of connection it shaped, and their legacies for our increasingly globalized present.

These artists draw on the historical confluences shaped by the cotton trade to frame the formal composition of their artworks and drive its narrative substance. Each of these artists engage with the material and the social meanings of cotton in their work and use the culture of the commodity—not simply as subject but as a formal compositional element—to comment on the legacies of colonial and transnational histories in the present. Himid and Shonibare use the weblike structure of cotton's production to chart associations between people and places across the globe, while Thomas and Drew work with the multiple iterations of cotton's visual representation as it has framed Black labor, connecting the present with its past. In other words, these artists do not use cotton solely to represent these nineteenth-century

histories: the materiality of cotton is what gives their work its form. Their work both highlights and uncovers the different "memories" of the material—something that emerges from the interplay of historical sources and cultural associations—as it continues to exist in the present. These memories seem embedded in the material itself, and much like we might read a painting or print by analyzing and unpicking its layers of meaning, they do something similar with the materiality of cotton.

My book is not an illustrated history of cotton, but—in drawing on these contemporary artists' formulation of, and bearing toward, the past—it is particularly concerned with the visual and material associations between Blackness and cotton. And in each chapter my historical orientation is framed by the formal conditions of their artworks. In looking at their work, I have found new understandings of historical material, new methodologies for addressing archival loss, and new frameworks for reading the transnational meaning of objects. These artists have opened up art history for me, providing me with new ways of looking at nineteenth-century visual and material culture, while also challenging the ways Black subjects are made legible now.

All of these artists, in some way, restage the practice of archiving, both in their use of materials and in the narratives they articulate and stage. Materially, their use of objects such as cotton fiber or cloth recalls both what is present and what is absent from historical archives while calling attention to what is deeply embedded in, and can be gleaned, viewed, and remembered from, the discarded and disregarded materials of the past. They do not merely reiterate the official archives but approach them with a difference. In this case, working with what is absent from the official story is to work with both what is supplemental to and what cannot be held within the archive. From this interstitial space, they find ways to reorient and animate our view of the past, a form of redress that requires us to approach the temporal and spatial meanings of objects in new and sometimes surprising ways. This is why I take my cue from these artists. They compel us to see and think differently about our relationship to the past and challenge how we conceptualize its temporal and spatial edges and divides. They continue to materialize a historical imaginary that is both relational and haptic, in which the connection between objects and people and places is embodied, shaped by gestures, texture, and feeling as much as it is by figures and forms. Following their approach to reading objects and their historical meaning is to disassemble the relationship of vision, value, and materiality that framed (frames) Blackness, and to rehearse other potentialities expressed and experienced by Black communities.

The historical association between Blackness and cotton, foregrounded by their market equivalence, has been reified into a visual association that appears almost self-evident in the United States. But, as Nicole Fleetwood points out, "the field of vision is a formation that renders racial marking, producing the viewing subject who is . . . inserted into systems of visual discourse that saw the world before the particular subject came into being."[3] She reminds us to ask both how and why racial referents become sutured to their signifiers, and how this suturing relies on an ambivalent conflation between the visible and visual. How is it, to quote Sara Ahmed, that "things get bound together"?[4]

Like Thomas, I am interested in the genealogies of this association. Thomas's modified imagery reminds me of botanical drawings with their cross-sectional, multi-angle views that revealed the various parts of a plant and its development. Botanical illustrations tracked a sequence of movements from the collection of a specimen, its visual codification, and its circulation thereafter.[5] This sequential aspect of botanical illustration was particularly significant for descriptions of cotton, a plant whose scientific importance was always entwined with its commercial significance. The Scottish botanist George Watt (1851–1930) opens his classic treatise on cotton by saying "it would not be far from correct to describe Cotton as the central feature of the world's modern commerce."[6] Documenting a cotton plant's growth, structure, and development over time was to document the very properties that made it so significant. A cotton flower blooms about two to three months after planting; the bloom then withers away to a green pod from which the fluffy cotton fibers will burst. The flower, while pleasing to the eye, was the precursor to the lush white fiber that holds together Thomas's print. To see cotton was to also look forward to its use as commodity.

Speculation underpinned cotton production, and this book focuses on the crop's production in the United States. Cotton had been grown in Asia, Africa, and the Americas for millennia; however, by the latter decades of the eighteenth century demand began to exceed supply.[7] Up until the 1780s, British cotton manufacturers had relied on small-scale suppliers located anywhere from the Ottoman Empire to the Caribbean. As the price of raw cotton increased, planters in the Caribbean expanded their plantation production, acquiring more land and requiring more slaves to do so. Planters in the United States had been growing the crop from as early as 1607 and had also been cultivating knowledge about the plant in other regions, including the Caribbean;, however, much of US production was for domestic consumption. The rapid expansion of cotton cultivation in the United States, as plant-

ers noticed rising prices, was aided by the reduced supply from the Caribbean following the disruption, through rebellion, of cotton production in Saint-Domingue (later Haiti), once Europe's most significant source of the fiber. With Eli Whitney's patenting of the cotton gin in 1794, daily production of processed cotton—that is, the amount of cotton that enslaved people could pick and clean—grew exponentially: using the gin, a single enslaved person could, in a day, clean fifty pounds of cotton instead of only one pound.[8]

The result was a cotton rush as planters searched out more land and brought with them more slaves.[9] Cotton was often likened to white gold. Planters moved first into the interiors of South Carolina and Georgia, and from the early nineteenth century they migrated south and west—to Alabama, Louisiana, Mississippi, Arkansas, and Texas. Cotton did not grow well in newly prepared soil, so planters were encouraged to grow crops such as corn for a season or two in order to prepare the soil before cotton planting could begin. Cotton was also a thirsty crop. In order to ensure efficient and adequate irrigation and drainage, the planting of crops, the digging of furrows, and the turning of the soil required careful organization and planning.[10] However, to meet rising domestic and international consumption, planters and farmers eschewed crop rotation, focusing only on cotton cultivation. A planter from Putnam County, Georgia, wrote in 1833 that "we appear to have but one rule—that is to make as much cotton as we can, and wear out as much land as we can."[11] Overworking the land this way led to soil exhaustion, forcing planters to find new areas for cultivation while leaving behind depleted fields and irrigation systems.[12]

The "cotton rush" that enveloped planters, colonial administrators, factors, and industrialists shaped what I would call a speculative vision: a way of seeing the natural world through the lens of profit. This was materialized through environmental transformation. In practical terms, this meant land clearance, which took place in the displacement of Indigenous people and the clearing of dense vegetation to make way for agricultural use: the division of land and its management as plantations. As planters moved south and demand for the commodity grew, so too did the nation's domestic slave trade.[13] While I do not spend enough time on this relationship in this book, I am grateful to scholars Iyko Day and Tiffany Lethabo King, whose work traces how these acts of environmental violence, these "relations of conquest," mediated the interaction of Native American and African American communities under colonialism, and in our present.[14] The disposability of Native American communities correlates precisely with the usability of enslaved African Americans, who were forced to undertake this ecological clearing and would labor to harvest its profit.[15] These historical formations

FIGURE INTRO.5 · George Robertson (1748–1788), *Spring Head of Roaring River Estate*, 1775. Oil on canvas, 99.1 × 126.4 cm (39 × 49¾ in.). Collection of Wallace Campbell.

connect the projects of Native Studies and Black Studies, of decolonization and abolition. I want to emphasize, then, that the growth of cotton and its expansion in the Caribbean and the United States cannot be decoupled from the theft and expropriation of land inhabited by Indigenous peoples and from the expansion of the international slave trade.

The speculative vision that this cotton rush shaped finds a visual corollary in certain aspects of landscape representation, in particular the imperial plantation. Made for plantation owners, works such as George Robertson's (1748–1788) *Spring Head of Roaring River* (figure Intro.5), a painting from 1775 later published as an engraving by John Boydell, depicted colonial holdings in the Caribbean. In Robertson's view the Jamaican plantation, of writer and art collector William Beckford is a site of potentiality.[16] We do not see the full effects of human intervention—yet—but we can imagine them. These results are visualized in English lithographer James Richard Barfoot's (1794–1863) *Progress of Cotton* (figures Intro.6–Intro.17), a series of prints from 1840 that begins with a frontal view of a plantation where a group of Black

FIGURE INTRO.6 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #1 Cotton Plantation*, 1840. No. 1 of a set of 12 lithographs with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm ($13^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{3}/_{16}$ in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

FIGURE INTRO.7 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #2 Willowing*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm ($13^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{3}/_{16}$ in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

FIGURE INTRO.8 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #3 Lap-Frame*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm (13 9/16 × 19 3/16 in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

FIGURE INTRO.9 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #4 Carding*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm (13 9/16 × 19 3/16 in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

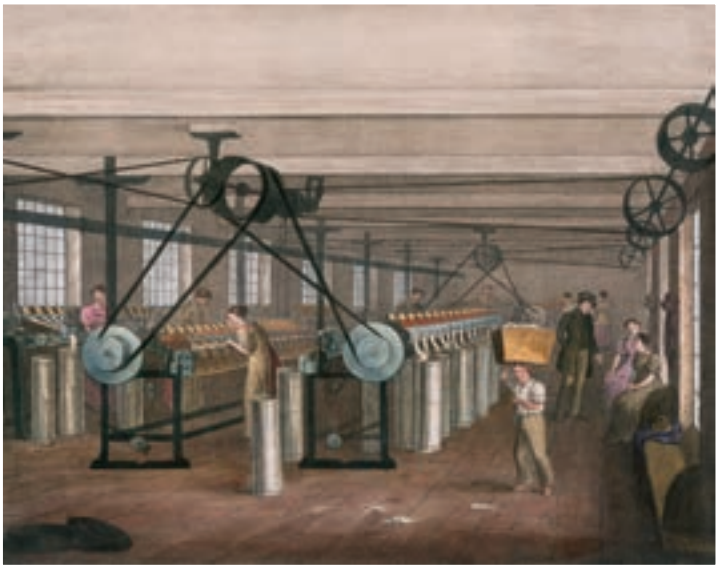

FIGURE INTRO.10 · James Richard Barfoot, (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #5 Bobbing and Drawing Frames*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm ($13^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{3}/_{16}$ in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

FIGURE INTRO.11 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #6 Spinning*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm ($13^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{3}/_{16}$ in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

FIGURE INTRO.12 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #7 Bleaching*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm ($13^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{3}/_{16}$ in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

FIGURE INTRO.13 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #8 Warping and Winding*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm ($13^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{3}/_{16}$ in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

FIGURE INTRO.14 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #9 Reeding or Drawing In*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm ($13^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{3}/_{16}$ in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

FIGURE INTRO.15 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #10 Weaving*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm ($13^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{3}/_{16}$ in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

FIGURE INTRO.16 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #11 Dying*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm ($13^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{3}/_{16}$ in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

FIGURE INTRO.17 · James Richard Barfoot (1794–1863), *Progress of Cotton: #12 Printing*, 1840. Lithograph with color sheet, 34.5 × 48.8 cm ($13^{9}/_{16} \times 19^{3}/_{16}$ in.). Mabel Brady Garvan Collection, Yale University Art Gallery, New Haven, CT.

enslaved workers picks cotton.[17] Barfoot's plantation scene reminds me of Solomon Northrup's description of the visual effect of a cotton plantation: "There are few sights more pleasing to the eye than a wide cotton field when it is in full bloom. It presents an appearance of purity, like an immaculate expanse of light, new fallen snow."[18] Northrup's description evokes the objective beauty of the crop but also reinforces another way that cotton's natural beauty is tied to its commercial value. The visual appeal of the cotton plant appears here as magnification (a field in bloom, an expanse), beauty that comes from magnitude. Although we do not see the endless rows of cotton bolls softly swayed by gusts of wind, Thomas's photograph evokes this scene. We have seen it over and over in our mind's eye, reinforced by a century's worth of imagery showing vast expanses of cotton, and (sometimes) the workers who pick them. In descriptions like Northrup's and in those endless scenes of cotton plantations, the density of cotton threatens to obscure our vision of all else. Even the cotton itself starts to fade from sight; its sheer magnitude transforms it into something decorative, ornamental, a kind of ground cover.

In these visual representations, the plantation is a place where human intervention—seen, or imagined, through landscaping, spatial organization, and crop cultivation—is translated into signs of a bountiful arcadia.[19] As genre paintings or as landscape art signifying the domestication of the natural world, plantation representations functioned as an emblem of a planter's status, providing an important social and economic marker of ownership and control. Viewers look over and across the plantation as we do in Barfoot's first lithograph. Harnessing this speculative vision—which I unpack further in chapter 1—representations of plantations as forms of imperial landscape mediated relationships between humans and the natural world, as expressions of "potentially limitless reserves of value."[20]

I follow this gaze by following cotton's movement and manufacture. As a highly profitable commodity, cotton had a market value—its exchangeability—that also mediated such a view of the natural world. Its growth was spurred by, and promoted, a speculative vision of the land that looked ahead to the profit that was to come. While we might say that most agricultural commodities mediate such a relationship to the land, cotton made this visible in a unique way because of its geographical movement and transformation from fiber to fabric. Growing cotton, planters looked ahead to its harvest. Harvesting cotton, they looked ahead to its sale to cotton merchants, who in turn, looked ahead to its manufacture and sale as cloth. Cotton was not simply a symbol of profit. It framed a sense of projection—based on desire for profit—that was materialized in its production. Looking at cot-

ton was to also look through space, across time, to look into the distance and see potential value.

These descriptions of cotton form part of its archival memory, and my book holds this speculative view that cotton signifies in tension with the relationality that its movement also materialized. Its movements can be traced from documents and ledgers, visualized in the sometimes surprising collections of cloth scattered across the globe. The movement of commodities has also come to frame a relational turn in several academic disciplines, connected to the urgency of contemporary forms of globalization. What does relationality allow us to see? For a start, I use cotton's mobility to emphasize the entanglements of Indian Ocean and Atlantic Ocean trades. Cotton helped spur industrialization and design practices in Britain and the United States. Small-scale imports of Indian raw cotton and textiles to Britain through the East India Company began in the seventeenth century.[21] The textiles were used domestically, re-exported to the British colonies, and traded for slaves in West Africa. Demand for Indian textiles grew in the eighteenth century, in turn spurring the development of a British cotton industry that sought to find ways of imitating Indian textiles. While this "import substitution" aimed to satisfy the domestic market for textiles, it was also the case that manufacturers used these textiles to gain greater control over the African slave trade.[22] These developments were also connected to the increase in cotton exports from the United States and the expansion of its own domestic manufactures.[23] The point here is that the development and growth of the Anglo-American cotton trade, while emerging from a long set of commercial relations with India, was underpinned by the forcible transportation of Black enslaved people from West Africa in exchange for cotton cloth and their labor in American plantations: the market for cotton was an underlying economic factor in the trade in Black bodies.[24]

To centralize the relationship between these processes of the market and the "social life" of cotton (to paraphrase Arjun Appadurai) is to engage directly with the Black experience of capitalist processes of commodification.[25] Enslaved men and women of African origin were, effectively, subject to the same market disciplines that shaped the trade in cotton as a commodity. Furthermore, as the artworks of Hank Willis Thomas, Lubaina Himid, and Yinka Shonibare all make clear, because cotton moved globally, bringing different places and people into contact with each other, the legacies of these historical relationships continue to inflect the representation, and experience, of people in the Black diaspora today.[26]

What does it mean, then, to think relationally in this instance, to "view" the plantation and factory as they were—connected within a global indus-

trial complex—when the movement of enslaved Africans tracked that of cotton? First bought and sold in exchange for cotton cloth, the enslaved were shipped across the Atlantic. Then, bought and sold in relation to the price of cotton fiber, they were shipped along the Mississippi in ever-increasing numbers to ensure that supplies of that commodity met demand.[27] If cotton, historically, could be used to evoke something like a global imaginary, this imaginary could only take shape around the commodification of Black people. Increasingly in the field of art history, the mobility of objects is being used to reorient it beyond national frameworks or stylistic chronologies. But what does relationality as a methodology offer us when its routes are predicated on the operations of this racial (global) capitalism? As these nineteenth-century representations reveal, models of relationality do not always disassemble the existing hierarchies structured through their circulation.

Examining these representations of the movement of cotton is, for me at least, to grapple with the relational imaginary of slavery itself—one that cuts across chronologies—and its particular optics: the burdened visuality of Black subjectivity. Mobility is a fraught term for scholars of the Black diaspora when, as Ian Baucom argues, enslaved people were themselves not just mobile commodities but also "a flexible, negotiable, transactable form of money."[28] It is in the archives that we most often encounter enslaved people in this fluid form, as we follow trails where Black life is numbered in ledgers and listed on bills of sale. Their lives are also embedded in the stock values of cotton, in the price of a cotton bale, and in the profits returned from its sale.

What I trace in this book is how the economic equivalency, established through slavery, between Black people and white cotton was used as a visual modality to relegate Black lives to raw material. From these connections between archives, financial reports, and artworks, we have the outline of a visual framework through which Blackness could be constructed, speculatively, as indivisible from productivity and profits. These outlines bring into view what Saidiya Hartman has described as the "racial calculus" of Black life.[29] It is part of what Christina Sharpe has written is a political and particular "arithmetic," one that devalues Black life, turns flesh into figures, and holds these lives captive even as they became the most mobile of forms.[30]

Hank Willis Thomas formulates this market equivalency as an entanglement and shared intimacy in his print. He creates a tension between the highly pixelated glistening white of the cotton fiber and the finely grained Black skin as they bifurcate the animated background. There is no way of ignoring the effect of cotton. While the cotton might soften the image, it also hardens its meaning. Its effect—cloudlike, ethereal—is contrasted with

the creased skin where softness is attenuated into a surface stretched tight. As the creases settle across palms and wrists, we might imagine the feel of skin so fragile it could split apart with a touch or, instead, roughened out like leather. The photograph is activated by these textures and holds them tightly, just as the hands hold tightly to the cotton. This sense of containment is reinforced by the careful placement of wrist over wrist, an action that evokes the binding of hands. With their hands and bodies bound and shackled, enslaved Africans were transported from slave forts in West Africa to the plantations of the New World. A simple gesture, Thomas uses crossed wrists here to also signal the ways Black Africans, enslaved and free, were bound up with and bound to cotton itself.

But, seen from this perspective, perhaps it is not the hands that encapsulate the cotton so much as the cotton that is forcing its way through and onto the body. The hands might be a register of the effects of cotton: deep lines and furrows, raised ridges and creased joints, all of these providing physical evidence of the arduous labor of cultivating and picking the plant. Even as they hold the cotton up toward the surface, these working hands emulate the grip needed to pluck the fiber from its case. On the parts of the fingers we cannot see, perhaps there are calloused and darkened lines where the plant's dry bolls have cut and pierced the skin. The glistening beauty of cotton is now contrasted with something else: a life bent in hard labor, perspiring in the heat of summer, abused by the plantation owner, the body lacerated. The photograph compels us to see how a body might grow around a plant, to imagine how its marks and its scars, its misshapen joints or the changed textures of its skin, might be read through the life cycle of labor and a cotton plant. The photograph pushes us to recognize not just the ways a market relationship connected Black lives and white cotton, but also how that relationship of equivalency was materialized, took physical shape, and conjoined enslaved (and, later, free) plantation workers with the cotton they worked.

Thomas's work revolves around archival memories, their relationship to vision, and the ways that the visual structures social life. Using and manipulating archival images, he reveals their continued currency in contemporary life to reinforce how ways of seeing are constructed through these historical forms. In foregrounding the equivalency between Black Americans and white cotton, Thomas is also highlighting the visual nature of this market relation and the role of images in constructing and maintaining its meaning. The weight of images like this is heavy. Their mass circulation—indeed, their ubiquity—underscores and perhaps reifies the relationship between Black people and white cotton. One question we are left with is, How do we

keep seeing what cannot be visualized, beyond this logic of projection and profit?

My aim in this book is not to reinforce archival histories but, drawing from Hank Willis Thomas, to disassemble their optics. By emphasizing the visual implications of this market logic, my book makes space for another kind of speculative vision that Thomas evokes in the tension between what can be seen and what might be felt. This involves a rather speculative approach to archives themselves that moves between their categorizations and their containments to search for perhaps unexpected historical alignments. Looking through the archive as an ongoing site of memory reorients narratives as unfinished—reorients our view of history and its unfolding. For Thomas gestures toward what is enfolded in the very texture of cotton as an opening, as a fugitive space made legible through traces of touch and feeling. From the realm of the haptic he takes us toward a realm of experience, not to give voice to the enslaved but to "imagine what cannot be verified" and to "reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance."[31]

SPECULATIVE VISIONS · In choosing to focus specifically on the representation of African American people, I aim to emphasize the ways their historical association with cotton, first as enslaved workers and then, later, as free laborers, revolved around a speculative vision. The trade in cotton, from cultivation to manufacture, was animated by a series of transactions focused on cotton's potential market profits. It is this speculative economic relationship that structures my reading of the ways cotton was used to shape constructions of Black people through their potential for productivity. In this sense my reading is closely aligned with Jennifer L. Morgan's notion of "futurity." Morgan uses this term to discuss the bequeathing of female slaves by North American plantation owners to family members or to pay debts because of Black women's reproductive potential. Their value lay in the future capital they would bring to their owners through their productive and reproductive labors in enlarging their owners' slave populations.[32] She demonstrates the historical implications of market relations for the construction of race and gender.[33] I draw on this analysis to further examine how this economic nexus gave rise to specific material conditions and visual relations for the framing, representation, and viewing of (Black) working bodies. Plantation owners speculated on cotton and enslaved people, for both could bring future profit. And as Frederick Douglass explained to his

audiences, the future profit that an enslaved Black person might make for her or his owner was closely tied to the value of cotton; both were commodities, and their monetary value—in the first half of the nineteenth century—was intimately connected.[34] To speculate, in this context, describes an outlook that is always contingent: a way of seeing that relies on what is now visible to project future economic gains.

I use the term *speculative vision* to both unpack this economic relationship between Blackness and white cotton and foreground its visual implications. To speculate is to assess. It requires a quantitative reading—what I call a "visual accounting"—that sustains the devaluation of Black life.[35] In my chapters, and drawing especially on the insights of Christina Sharpe and the spatial politics of Black life theorized by Katherine McKittrick, I trace, and challenge, how these processes of assessment are manifested, produced, and staged through visual means that materialized Blackness as an expression of value and, more often, of future value.[36] Throughout my book I also consider how this mode of assessment finds parallels in the commodity value of art itself and the speculative act of (aesthetic) valuation that rely on processes of abstraction: an elision of the presence of labor, the role of bodies, and the value of physical work.

I focus on the concept of the speculative to deconstruct how vision can be constructed as a process of abstraction, drawing in part from Marx's conceptualization of the effects of capital and the social relations of commodification. For the "spectral completion of commodity fetishism" is ultimately "human reification: where people appear to be no more than things."[37] And so my chapters examine the ways cotton, its uses, and its representation created conditions of viewership through which Blackness could be transformed into a commodity and Black lives into fungible objects.

These ways of seeing as they cohered around the Black body had wider implications for the experience and representation of landscapes and people across the Atlantic. Excavating these material conditions leads us to follow the networks shaped by commodity culture. Black experience not only was central to the history of cotton's cultivation and value; through their involvement in the cotton trade, Black laborers came into direct connection—through the medium of the commodity—with a range of actors. In centralizing this market connection between Blackness and white cotton and tracking its post-emancipation implications—not least the ways these economic relationships sustained by slavery continued to inflect colonial commerce—each chapter also examines how cotton moved in space, how it was transformed in shape, and how this mobility was represented and understood. These movements provide a representational paradigm for viewing

the transnational processes by which different bodies and landscapes are brought into conversation with each other, diachronically as well as synchronically. Drawing on, and inspired by, the expansive work of Lisa Lowe, I trace these dialogic associations as they were created between people, places, and things through networks of trade to materialize the relational aesthetics of transnational processes.[38]

On the one hand, this geography of cotton's trade provides a way of tracing the visual relations encapsulated in the speculative vision framed by cotton. It allows me to struggle with the weight of archives filled with erasures and a public sphere oversaturated with images that reduce Blackness to a state of objecthood. However, to chart a way through these spaces, it is also possible—drawing on the work of artists like Lubaina Himid and Yinka Shonibare—to speculate in other ways. The art and material culture I examine provided a framework for visualizing Blackness, historically, as inherently speculative. On the other hand, I also approach these objects, inspired by Saidiya Hartman's term "critical fabulation," as speculative themselves: these objects are multifaceted.[39] They can materialize different histories and therefore different futures, in which conceptions of value, and Blackness, can be imagined beyond the constraints of the market. I want to bring these other possibilities into view for readers, through my archival work, in order to destabilize and "displace the received or authorized account."[40] Similarly, in the networked history of cotton's production and its material movements, it is possible to imagine other routes of connection, by which alternative historical conditions are brought into view that offer alternative conceptions of what our present could be.[41]

BLACK BODIES, WHITE GOLD: VISION, VALUE, AND FORM • Throughout this book, what I foreground is the commensurability constructed between cotton as commodity and Blackness to theorize an ontology of racial representation that I believe continues to influence the ways Blackness is recognized and understood in our contemporary moment. As commodity forms, cotton and Black bodies reflected each other: the value of Black labor was expressed through and on the material of cotton itself. In turn, cotton in its raw and material forms helped make Black lives legible as profitable property. I have learned much from Alessandra Raengo, Jasmine Nichole Cobb, Sarah E. Lewis, and Nicholas Mirzoeff as they investigate the relationship between race and representation in structuring our social sphere, particularly in the United States. They remind us of the foundational visual logic

of slavery, reiterating how in its particular optics, forged through capitalism and captivity, the Black body—in particular the Black female body—comes into the visual field as a site of production.[42] In my study, excavating—and challenging—this scopic regime is a through line. I argue that the market equivalence created between cotton and Black bodies galvanized a hermeneutics of the surface around Blackness that gave rise to a condition of viewership whereby Black bodies could (and had to) be read as embodiments of the commodity form.

This ontological reading of the relationship between Blackness and visuality, shaped by the market for cotton, follows a roughly chronological trajectory from slavery to its abolition in the United States. In historicizing this condition of viewership I want to interrogate the operation of structures of racialization that interpret the visible Black body through a continued reliance on discourses of commodification and utility, even after the objectification of slavery had come to an end. I examine how these relationships of vision and value mediated the unfinished project of emancipation, the constrained nature of freedom, and the complicated nature of subjectivity for Black Americans.[43] This trajectory also connects histories of slavery and colonialism more closely, and I show how these transactions and networks of commercial exchange and exploitation influenced the visual production and social meanings of Blackness beyond the United States.

The afterlives of slavery in the visual production of Black artists, and in the visual construction of Blackness, are being provocatively theorized by scholars across disciplines. In particular, working between the contemporary and the historical, Krista A. Thompson's mobilization of contemporary Black diaspora art as the framework for expanding our engagement with slavery's archive, has reshaped the fields of Black Studies and Art History.[44] Huey Copeland has examined how contemporary Black diaspora artists, following cultural and academic shifts in the 1960s, found "new possibilities for navigating slavery as a site of cultural production."[45] His study probes the implications of slavery's visual resonance, tracing how its relationship to Blackness emerged in critical aesthetic spaces, as some Black artists themselves became more prominent in the mainstream US art world in the late twentieth century. Kimberly Juanita Brown's study traces the erasure of the archive and the centrality of the visual to studies of the Black Atlantic. Holding these in tension, she engages contemporary artists whose work in restructuring Black women's representation also restructure acts of seeing and, therefore, forms of living.[46] Art historical readings of the representation of enslaved Africans and African Americans by Gwendolyn DuBois Shaw and Mia L. Bagneris show us how artworks, like portals, can open up

long-held attachments of memory and material to alternative narratives of Black resilience.[47]

In gratitude for these scholars' pathbreaking work, *Black Bodies, White Gold* holds eighteenth- and nineteenth-century art and material culture in dialogue with contemporary artists' varying, and material, responses to the history of slavery and the enslaved subject to construct an alternate historical methodology, an alternate historical imaginary. The contemporary artists I focus on here emphasize the importance of things—of materiality—in scripting our interaction with history, with knowledge production, and with place. Their methodology aligns with that of performance studies theorists who emphasize how objects perform and enact their presence on human actors.[48] This is why I look closely both at how cotton is represented and at how it interacts with and acts on bodies. Similarly, when historicizing the objects that make up my case studies, I consider how their circulation today also scripts our own interactions with the past. These visual and material objects are not merely representational; they act on, and are acted upon within, the contexts in which they moved. Focusing on the haptic quality of these objects allows me to think relationally—not (only) representationally—and put seemingly disparate sources into dialogue together. Engaging with the haptic is also key to untangling the ways meaning comes to congeal in objects, as well as the way the intangible qualities of things take on material meanings.

I employ a methodology of "thick description" borrowed from cultural anthropology.[49] On the one hand, I explore the symbolic meanings of cotton, particularly in relation to ideas about progress, the workings of the market, and definitions around commerce. On the other hand, I also excavate the physical associations and resonances of the material itself, considering what it meant to work with, touch, or wear cotton, alongside attending to contexts of production and use. Each chapter draws on visual representation and written and material sources showing how, on the basis of the material associations of cotton, we can form a theoretical paradigm of representation in which the visual, the verbal, and the haptic intersect.

CHAPTER SUMMARY · In my first two chapters, I draw from Lubaina Himid's *Cotton.com* to deal with the currency of cotton shaped by networks of colonial commerce and the transatlantic slave trade. In chapter 1, I focus on the production of "negro cloth," its materialization of the Black body as commodity, and the ways it connected enslaved plantation laborers with factory operatives. I argue that these nineteenth-century actors—both Black

and white—drew on the haptic nature of cotton cloth to shape real, and imagined, correspondences between their lives and labors across antebellum America. While negro cloth materialized Blackness as a form of property, I also reflect on the embodied ways that Black enslaved workers responded to this regulation using the haptic qualities of cloth to reformat and reenvision these connections between cotton, Blackness, and value. I bring the chapter full circle with a discussion of African American artist Edward Mitchell Bannister's painting of a New England textile factory.

Chapter 2 moves us to the factories of Manchester, England. Focusing on paintings by Agostino Brunias (1730–1796) and Eyre Crowe (1824–1910), it traces another aspect of the relationship between cotton, visual culture, and slavery: the production of patterned cloth for African, African American, and Afro-Caribbean communities in the late eighteenth century and the first half of the nineteenth. The chapter explores the relationship between color, cotton, and commodification in shaping what I call a *market aesthetics*. I use this term first to examine how markets, textiles, and circulating images connected various sites across the Atlantic Ocean. I unpack it further by analyzing Black people's aestheticization as objects in the slave market as well as examining representations of these market scenes. The chapter draws a connection between the visual dynamics of the gaze encoded in art's display and the transactional dynamics of the slave market to reflect on the ways Blackness was constructed as a speculative condition itself.

In chapter 3 I turn to geography of labor on the plantation following emancipation. Drawing on Hank Willis Thomas's print and its reflection on the fetishization of Blackness, this chapter explores the representation of the Black sharecropper. I move between a variety of objects here. I use photographs of self-emancipated African Americans on the Sea Islands of South Carolina; printed and painted representations of cotton, plantations, and industrial labor in the postbellum era; and paintings by Edgar Degas (1834–1917) and Winslow Homer (1836–1910). Through these works I trace the physical, symbolic, and embodied associations between Black Americans and cotton in the context of emancipation and explore how these constructions about the value of Blackness inflected US culture after Reconstruction. In particular, I examine how these works materialized an ambivalence about the position of newly free Black Americans and articulate a way of seeing that desired proof that Black Americans could become productive citizens. This chapter ends with a brief overview of the ways Black intellectuals and artists—faced with constantly having to prove their value—defied these conditions to project narratives that expanded the limits of representation and constructions of value.

In my final chapter I use the work of Yinka Shonibare to bring this book to its conclusion. The chapter is framed historically by the cessation of the transatlantic slave trade, emancipation in the United States, and the implications of both for British and American colonial expansion. Bringing together the visual analysis I carried out in earlier chapters that connected commerce, cotton, and representations of landscape, here I focus on Shonibare's tableau *Scramble for Africa* (2003), which is animated by the interconnected networks of the cotton trade and British and American commercial colonialism. By the end of the nineteenth century, the trade in cotton was used to frame a speculative vision of West Africa as a site for British and American colonial expansion. This commercial vision was demonstrated in museum and exhibition displays in the United States and Britain, whose history I briefly explore as I examine the ways West Africa was imagined as something like a new plantation and a new market for Anglo-American cotton manufactures. This tableau also allows me to reflect on the speculative conditions that have shaped this book—the historical frameworks by which Black life has come to be imagined through the extractive logic of capital—and offer up others. I focus in particular on the textile histories and practices embedded in Shonibare's work to consider the speculative imaginaries they materialize. Alongside this I discuss the ways textiles themselves become sites of material history in which the intimacies and entanglements of their production produce alternative imaginaries of how our present came to be.

I end this book with the work of Leonardo Drew and reflect on his use of cotton as medium and subject, playing on the ways vision and social value continue to shape contemporary life. The continued relevance of these histories compel us to examine how these conceptions of Blackness came to be. Refusing and revising remind us that the work of excavating these histories is not complete; it remains an ongoing necessity.

In its continued existence in the present, an object can never reflect its context fully; thus any historical narrative that emerges is only partial. I think of this relationship between past and present as something like an illumination by which, through careful and attentive exploration, the power of objects to open up onto the worlds they are part of might be understood.[50] In creating the scope and trajectory of this project I recognize my own role in the (re)construction of the past. It is for this reason that I also consider the relationship between contemporary art practice and histories of colonialism to suggest that this kind of reconstruction might be a form of translation or dynamic encounter only emerging from an intensive engagement with the object itself. I have framed my historical scholarship through the

work of contemporary artists because their artistic practice can enliven our understanding of the production of historical knowledge. These artists animate a history that materializes the intimacies between people, places, and things brought together by the slave trade and its aftermath in the Atlantic world. And I have crafted a study that uses the embedded meanings of objects to reveal these moments of entanglement.[51] To historicize these expressions of interconnectedness is to account for their emergence from unequal distributions of power as much as their emergence through the material and visual qualities of the objects themselves.

In general, then, the objects I analyze here rehearse what Amy Robinson argues is "the visual logic of commodity exchange," framing the ways that, in an exchange-based system, "social value, is also a problematic of visuality."[52] This relationship between vision and value is the central theme of the book. Asking how Black bodies and white cotton—white gold—achieved a kind of visual parity through their form, excavating the ways this relationship emerged from economies of exchange in which cotton and Blackness enhanced each other's "appearance of value" as commodity forms, is not to fetishize the commodity and re-objectify bodies already abstracted to their exchange value. Rather, it is to propose a method for uncovering an ontology of the surface, crucial to such economies of exchange, in which things come to appear as they are:— as natural manifestations of an immaterial real, as something that goes without saying.

When we think about the "value" of Blackness, then, it is crucial to understand not just how these surface aesthetics (continue to) shape racial representation but also how they came to be formulated through this comparative relationship, through this relationship of form, to begin with. It is important to return to these questions in a society where race continues to be read on and through the surface of the body, as an exteriorization of some kind of innate difference. I finished this book amid the deadly spring and summer of 2020. We watch the devastation of the COVID-19 pandemic as it lays bare the racial disparities in healthcare in the United States where Black (and Latinx and Indigenous) people are dying at far higher rates than white Americans. Still, in 2020, we watch continued, almost unchecked police brutality and the murders of Black people. We have witnessed the powerful and ongoing protests against the murders of George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, Ahmaud Arbery, and Elijah McClain. We have seen statues topple.

I have written this book because I believe it is crucial to historicize these constructions of the value of Blackness in a nation where the disposability of Black and Brown lives continues to assail us from all sides. We need to understand these histories because their implications, their material effects,

their violence affect us all. They must be seen for what they are—central to the project of nation building—if we are to work for different futures. We need to dismantle in order to rebuild. I hope this book, in deconstructing these visual histories, will support the work of Black communities, particularly the work of Black women, who have always mobilized, to reimagine the conditions under which we *all* can live equitably and without oppression.[53] That is why I have explored these relationships of form. I can only hope that the urgency of this subject matter might propel readers to a deeper and more active understanding of the material and affective meanings of the visual sphere as we use it to shape, reinforce, and challenge the ways Blackness has mattered—and continues to matter.

Notes

INTRODUCTION: THREADS OF EMPIRE

1. Prown, *Art as Evidence*, 255. I am thinking here of Prown's discussion of an artifact as "an historical event, something that happened in the past. But unlike other historical events, it continues to exist in the present and can be re-experienced and studied as primary and authentic evidence surviving from the past."

2. Enwezor, "Artefacts of Memory," 47.

3. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 7.

4. Ahmed, "Affective Economies," 118.

5. Bleichmar, "Painting as Exploration," 81–104; Schiebinger, *Plants and Empire*, 23–72.

6. Watt, *Wild and Cultivated Cotton Plants of the World*, 10.

7. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton*, 85–97. Because cotton was cheaper and less labor intensive than sugar, Caribbean planters could produce millions of pounds of cotton, but to do so they needed greater swathes of land and more and more slaves. The rapid expansion of cotton in the United States followed a similar pattern.

8. Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin*; Temin, *Engines of Enterprise*.

9. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton,* 98–120.

10. Barbee, *Cotton Question*, 26–85.

11. Ruffin, "Planting in Georgia," 490.

12. Saikku, *This Delta, This Land*, 85–100.

13. Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 209–44; W. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*.

14. T. King, *Black Shoals,* xi, 74–110.

15. Day, *Alien Capital*, 27–29.

16. See especially Bagneris, *Coloring the Caribbean*, 92–136.

17. According to the collector J. R. Abbey, *The Progress of Cotton* was a "pictorial account of the cotton industry for the instruction of children, apparently young

children, the type being large and black and the words restricted to two syllables." Abbey, *Life in England*, 300.

18. Northup, *Twelve Years a Slave*, 166.

19. For more on the representation of plantations and its relationship to the genre of landscape, see Mack and Hoffius, *Landscape of Slavery*; Andrews, *Landscape and Western Art*.

20. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," 5.

21. Riello, *Cotton*, 87–110; Lemire, *Fashion's Favourite*, 10–30.

22. Inikori, "Slavery and the Revolution," 344; Inikori and Engerman, *Atlantic Slave Trade*, 152–55; Riello, *Cotton*, 211–38. African trade with India for cotton textiles had been taking place since at least the early modern period. Raw cotton from India, the Caribbean, Brazil, and the Levant supplied British cotton manufacturers, until the invention of the cotton gin. Makepeace, "English Traders"; Alpern, "What Africans Got"; Ware, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture*; Lakwete, *Inventing the Cotton Gin*.

23. In the United States, the growth of the plantation system, government protectionism, and the constriction of British imports during the War of 1812 also helped boost its cotton industry and its factory-based systems of production. By 1850 the New England textile industry was well established. Deyle, *Carry Me Back*, 15–63; W. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 1–73; J. Rosenbloom, "Path Dependence," 5; Ware, *Early New England Cotton Manufacture*; Temin, "Industrialization of New England."

24. Beckert, *Empire of Cotton,* 98–136.

25. Appadurai, *Social Life of Things*.

26. Eltis and Engerman, "Importance of Slavery"; Morris and Vaughan, *Trade and Empire*; Rice, "Cotton That Connects"; Barringer, *Before and After Modernism*.

27. W. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*, 74–96.

28. Baucom, *Specters of the Atlantic*, 62.

29. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother*, 6.

30. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother,* 6; Sharpe, *In the Wake,* 1–25.

31. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 2.

32. J. Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 69–143.

33. J. Morgan, *Laboring Women*, 166–96.

34. Douglass, *Narrative of the Life*, 237.

35. I borrow this term from the essay by Paul Staiti, "Accounting for Copley."

36. Sharpe, *In the Wake* and *Monstrous Intimacies*; McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds* and "Mathematics Black Life."

37. Curry-Machado, *Global Histories, Imperial Commodities*; Marx and Engels, *Das Kapital*, chap. 1 ("Commodification"); Balibar, *Philosophy of Marx*, 58; B. Brown, "Reification, Reanimation."

38. For more on the dialogic, see Bakhtin, *Dialogic Imagination*. See also Mercer, "Art History and the Dialogics"; Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*.

39. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11

40. Hartman, "Venus in Two Acts," 11.

41. Trouillot, *Silencing the Past*, 15. I am thinking here, in particular, about Michel-Rolph Trouillot's conception of "pastness"—as a relationship to history and the production of historical narratives.

42. Raengo, *On the Sleeve*; Cobb, *Picture Freedom*; Mirzoeff, *Right to Look*; Lewis, "Vision and Justice."

43. Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 115–25.

44. K. Thompson, *Eye for the Tropics* and *Shine*.

45. Copeland, *Bound to Appear*, 16.

46. K. Brown, *Repeating Body*.

47. Bagneris, *Coloring the Caribbean*; Bagneris, "Miscegenation in Marble"; Shaw, *Seeing the Unspeakable*; Shaw, *Portraits of a People*.

48. See, for example, Bernstein, "Dances with Things"; Taylor, *Archive and the Repertoire*, 1–53.

49. Geertz, *Interpretation of Cultures*, 13. As Geertz explains, this involves "fit[ting] lumps and fragments, objects and images . . . in relation to each other."

50. Benjamin, *Illuminations*, 300–305.

51. See especially Lowe, *Intimacies of Four Continents*; W. Johnson, *River of Dark Dreams*; Barringer, Forrester, and Martinez-Ruiz, *Art and Emancipation in Jamaica*.

52. A. Robinson, "Forms of Appearance of Value," 248.

53. I am thinking here particularly of the work of the Combahee River Collective, whose members have laid the groundwork for the kinds of activist work and political change—both in terms of social justice work and academic scholarship (although the two, to my mind, are always entangled)—taking place through movements such as #BlackLivesMatter, #RhodesMustFall, #NoDAPL, #8toAbolition and #museums arenotneutral. See especially Combahee River Collective, *Combahee River Collective Statement,* 12; K.-Y. Taylor, *How We Get Free*.

CHAPTER 1. CIRCUITS OF COTTON

1. Mitchell, "Imperial Landscape," 21–30.

2. O'Connor, *Lords of the Loom,* 67; Emerson, *Essays and English Traits*, 145.

3. Beckert, "Emancipation and Empire," 1407.

4. Thorpe, "Cotton and Its Cultivation," 447.