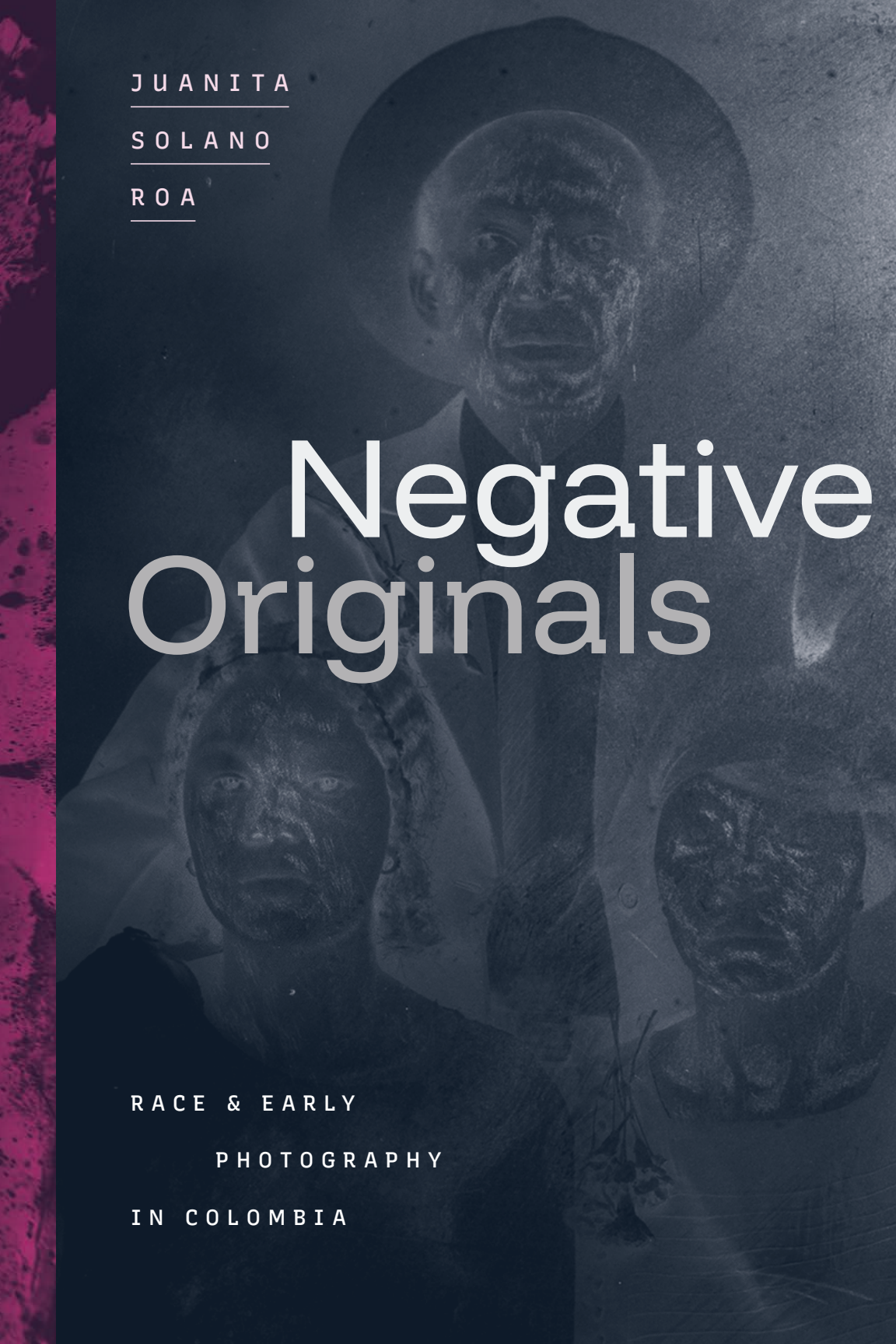




JUANITA

SOLANO

ROA

Negative Originals

RACE & EARLY

PHOTOGRAPHY

IN COLOMBIA

Negative
Originals

BUY



DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



Negative Originals

RACE AND EARLY
PHOTOGRAPHY
IN COLOMBIA

JUANITA SOLANO ROA

DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS DURHAM AND LONDON 2025

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

© 2025 DUKE UNIVERSITY PRESS

All rights reserved

Printed in the United States of America on
acid-free paper ∞

Project Editor: Liz Smith

Designed by Matthew Tauch

Typeset in MeropBasic, Funnel Display, and Recursive Sans
Linear Static by Westchester Publishing Services

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Names: Solano Roa, Juanita, author

Title: Negative originals : race and early photography in Colombia /
Juanita Solano Roa.

Other titles: Race and early photography in Colombia

Description: Durham : Duke University Press, 2025. |

Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2024054109 (print)

LCCN 2024054110 (ebook)

ISBN 9781478031994 (paperback)

ISBN 9781478028758 (hardcover)

ISBN 9781478060963 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Calle, Benjamín de la, 1869–1934 | Rodríguez Márquez,
Melitón, 1875–1942 | Rodríguez Márquez, Horacio Marino, 1866–1931 |

Photography—Colombia—Medellín—History—20th century | Photography
in ethnology—Colombia—Medellín—History—20th century | Photography—
Social aspects—Colombia—Medellín—History—20th century | Photographers—
Colombia—Medellín—History—20th century

Classification: LCC TR46.M43 S653 2025 (print) | LCC TR46.M43 (ebook) |

DDC 779.9861/26—dc23/eng/20250522

LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024054109>

LC ebook record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2024054110>

Cover art: Fotografía Rodríguez, *Pedro P. Villa*, 1930. Detail of gelatin dry plate
under raking light. Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín / Archivo fotográfico.

Photo: Esteban Duperly.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

TO ALICIA

DUKE

**UNIVERSITY
PRESS**

Contents

ix ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

1 Introduction

CHAPTER ONE

45 Envisioning a New Race: Photographic Manipulation
and the Discourse of *la raza antioqueña*

CHAPTER TWO

89 The Pictorial Negative: The Work of Horacio Marino
and Melitón Rodríguez

CHAPTER THREE

136 The Negative in Suspense: Deviant Subjects and
Bodies in the Work of Benjamín de la Calle

CHAPTER FOUR

176 Orientalism in the Andes: Itinerant Images and
Distant Negatives

CHAPTER FIVE

211 Negative Spaces: The Backdrops in Benjamín de la
Calle's and Fotografía Rodríguez's Photographs

251 NOTES
279 BIBLIOGRAPHY
297 INDEX

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Acknowledgments

WHILE MY NAME stands alone as the author of this book, its creation is truly a collaborative effort. I firmly believe that the fields of photography and its history are woven through the fabric of collaboration. Therefore, I extend my heartfelt gratitude to the extraordinary network of friends and mentors who have been instrumental in bringing this project to fruition. My mentors and now colleagues Edward Sullivan, Shelley Rice, and Robert Slifkin have not only shaped my perspective on the history of art and photography but have also provided invaluable feedback, incisive criticism, and profound insights that have enriched my methodological approaches and expanded my knowledge of the field. I am equally indebted to my colleagues at the Universidad de los Andes, especially Verónica Uribe and Camilo Hernández, whose careful reading of sections of the manuscript and invaluable feedback contributed significantly to its refinement. I would also like to thank Esteban Duperly for his intellectual generosity on the history of Antioquia, his feedback, and his help in so many instances in the writing of this book.

The realization of this project has been facilitated by the support of two grants and institutions: the Fondo de Apoyo a Profesores Asistentes (FAPA) of the Universidad de los Andes and the Institute for Studies on Latin American Art (ISLAA), an institution founded in 2011 and dedicated to expanding and enriching the narratives of Latin American art. I am very grateful for this generous support. In particular, I would like to thank Ana Malaver, Alejandro Giraldo, Sair García, and Rondy Torres from the Centro de Investigación y Creación at the School of Arts and Humanities at the Universidad de los Andes, and Ariel Aisiks, Lucy Hunter, and Blanca Serrano from ISLAA for making this project possible. I am also indebted

DUKE
UNIVERSITY
PRESS

to the Biblioteca Pública Piloto (BPP) in Medellín, especially to Jackeline García, whose management of the photographic archive was invaluable in the publication of the accompanying photographs. Alejandra Builes's efficiency in navigating through thousands of photographs and securing the necessary permissions for publication was also indispensable.

The publication of this book owes much to the generosity and insight of three anonymous reviewers, whose careful reading of the manuscript and valuable feedback were instrumental in shaping the theoretical underpinnings of the book. I am grateful to the dedicated staff at Duke University Press, especially Ken Wissoker, who believed in and saw the potential of the manuscript from the beginning. I would also like to thank Ryan Kendall and James Moore for guiding me through the process of publishing my first book in the United States. The indispensable contributions of my student assistants, Juanita Bayona and Camila Panader, cannot be overstated; their patience, organizational skills, and diligence in securing permissions and revising the extensive bibliography were instrumental in bringing this book to completion.

I am deeply grateful to my close friends Rachel Kim and Blanca Serrano, whose unwavering support and wise counsel have been invaluable companions on this exhilarating journey. Without their boundless generosity, wisdom, and affection, this project would not have come to fruition.

However, the most special and profound thanks go to my mother, Marcela Roa, my father, Mario Solano, my sister, Natalia Solano, and my husband, Felipe Restrepo. Their truly unconditional encouragement, advice, patience, and love made this book possible. Thank you for believing in me.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

x

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Introduction

LET US BEGIN by comparing the negative and the positive versions of a photograph taken at the turn of the twentieth century by Colombian photographer Benjamín de la Calle (figs. I.1 and I.2). The positive depicts a standardized wedding portrait of a couple posing in a photographic studio before a painted backdrop. They pose, holding each other by their arms and looking directly at the camera. The woman wears a black dress that covers her feet and a long white organza wedding veil on her head, with small decorative flowers that cover the frontal part of her hairdo. The man wears a suit, a white shirt, and leather shoes. The lapel of his jacket has small flowers on the left side (fig. I.1). There is nothing particularly interesting about this photograph. Nothing differentiates it from the millions of similar images taken worldwide during this period. However, when one looks at the negative original, surprising elements emerge. We notice that the wedding veil was not part of the original shot. Instead, the photographer carefully hand-painted it with an intense red dye. He also applied the same color on the man's cheeks and painted a small curved line at the bottom of the woman's dress to hint at her feet (fig. I.2). However, why did the photographer intervene with so much detail in a generic portrait? What do these interventions mean and convey?

Through an analysis of both negative and positive prints, this book examines the contradictions at work in the construction of identity through the juxtaposition of traditional portraiture that reinforced racial ideologies and the subversive depictions of usually excluded individuals such as cross-dressers, black, and poor people portrayed in dignifying ways. This book delves into the study of race and photography in Colombia at the turn of the twentieth century through the study of negative

D

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



DUKE

I.1. Benjamín de la Calle, Tomás Morales B. y señora: *San Cristóbal*, 1909.

Digital positive from original gelatin dry plate, 16 × 12 cm. Biblioteca Pública
Piloto de Medellín / Archivo fotográfico.

UNIVERSITY
PRESS



DUKE

I.2. Benjamín de la Calle, *Tomás Morales B. y señora: San Cristóbal*, 1909.

Gelatin dry plate, 16 × 12 cm. Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín /

Archivo fotográfico.

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

originals. It explores the construction of regional and national discourses that linked theories of race to those of progress and how such discourses were visualized or contested through photography. Through the examination of the work of Fotografía Rodríguez (Horacio Marino and Melitón Rodríguez) and Benjamín de la Calle, two photographic studios based in Medellín, Colombia, this book traces the construction, dissemination, and visual materialization of a racial discourse that emerged at the turn of the twentieth century in Colombia's Department of Antioquia.¹ It also looks at the resistance to such discourses through the same medium. Focusing on individual photographs, it addresses how these photographers challenged or circumscribed a discourse based on the invention of a new race. Working simultaneously in the same city, although surrounded by very different environments, de la Calle and the Rodríguez brothers addressed, sometimes resisting and other times supporting, distinctive ways of portraying a society that proclaimed itself more modern and progressive than the rest of Colombia and Latin America. By 1910, a group of intellectuals in the Department of Antioquia established a series of discourses surrounding identity in which the idea of a *raza antioqueña* (Antioquian race) emerged. They claimed that if "there is a place in Latin America where the ideal birthplace of a superior race exists, that place is Antioquia."²

This book focuses on the portraits produced by these two studios and the strategies employed in their artistic and commercial work through the ideas of regional progress, modernity, and the invention of a racial ideology. The Department of Antioquia cultivated a strong identity discourse around progress, with particular attention to the idea of the *raza antioqueña*. Since the early nineteenth century, and particularly after the devastating Guerra de los Mil Días (Thousand Days' War), the notion of progress became an agent that fostered and imposed material and ideological demands in the region.³ These ideas reached their apogee when the two studios were active and, despite the critical development that such notions have received since then, such an ideology still underscores identity discourses in the region. The alleged *raza antioqueña* took advantage of the region's economic boom to proclaim a superior race that distinguished the antioqueños from the rest of the country.⁴

Both products of positivist thinking during the nineteenth century, race and photography have worked hand in hand since early on. However, racial photographic representation has usually been discussed through the analysis of typological or scientific photography that took advantage

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

of the objectification and exoticization of Indigenous, mestizo, and black bodies. However, constructing these othered bodies would not have been possible without the simultaneous invention of a race that considered itself superior. Therefore, instead of expanding on the study of type and scientific photography in Latin America, my research analyzes the formation of racial discourses from the opposite perspective. I explore the construction of whiteness—and the discourses that challenged it—through the study of studio portraiture and its relation to the ideology encouraged by the intellectual elites in Colombia and promoted through publications, political policies, and social conventions. Taking as a point of departure the structuralist idea of binaries, I contend that the Latin American Other could not have been constructed without the invention of these whitening ideologies. My research explores this idea by analyzing the strategies used to promote this alleged racial superiority in materializing the discursive rhetorical practices into visual and physical forms. I explore the visual resistance that flourished in the work of lesser-known photographers who engaged with a more inclusive photographic approach.

Negatives and Race

From a theoretical point of view, the book addresses the duplicity of the photographic image. In opposition to traditional approaches, where the vintage positive copy of a photograph is the object analyzed, this study examines the implications of looking at the negative originals. The lack of institutional efforts in collecting and studying photography, the scarcity of funds, and the complicated sociopolitical situation of the country shaped the early history of Colombian (and Latin American) photography. These circumstances have led to collecting, conserving, and preserving the negatives rather than the positive prints. Previous analysis of most of the images included in this book, in particular those of de la Calle and Fotografía Rodríguez, has been achieved through modern digital copies (scans), overlooking other aspects of photography. If, as Ariella Azoulay suggests, we understand photography as an event, that is, as a series of actions, objects, relations, and encounters that are triggered by the (hypothetical) presence of the camera and the production of a photograph, then the negative is also a constituent part of the event

of photography.⁵ We can even think of something like a “negative event” as part of it. Most histories of photography in Latin America have focused solely on the exhibitional event of photography—that is, the exhibition and analysis of positive prints—overlooking this negative event. I argue that this negative event is not only closer to the photographed one, but it also constitutes a rawer and sometimes richer version of the final image. Negatives are imbued with manual interventions, retouching, and other types of image manipulation that have not played a role in the understanding of the photographs. Rather, they have been read only for what they visually represent and not for what they actively do. In this project, the material aspects of the photographic image play a central role because they speak about what lies behind the intended final visual result. Traditional analysis and display of photographic images only show positive prints or scans to the larger public in online or offline exhibitions. As stated by photo historian Olena Chervonik, “Its negative, its repressed Other, exists behind-the-scene, relegated to archival boxes and rarely seeing the light of day. . . . Even when collections choose to represent negatives alongside positives, often those negatives as tangible objects look different from their digitized forms.”⁶ I contend that looking at negatives expands our understanding of photography, giving us access to the process involved in creating an image and, thus, to the line of thought behind it. In this sense, photography is not a specific or decisive moment—that of capturing the event—but a longer and more complex composition of time that includes the process that led the photographer, the sitter, and all those involved to that event, and what lives and happens after it. Indeed, we can even think of a multiplicity of events and timelines that unfold at their own pace, triggered by the multiple copies that can come from a single negative. The negative is evidence of the fragmentation of the process and a step in the long temporality of photography.

But what exactly is a negative? Technically, negatives are fine silver particles suspended in a binder or emulsion of collodion, albumen, or gelatin, which is carried on a paper, glass, or film support.⁷ From a purely visual perspective, negatives are objects that present inverted images.⁸ In nineteenth-century monochrome photography, negatives reproduce the inversion of the shades of the photographed subject in its complete gradation of grayscale, modeling the subject and giving it a spectral quality. The values of the halftones play a pivotal role in the definition of the photographic negative, something that, as noted by Bertrand Lavédrine, most

literature tends to oversimplify.⁹ Definitions of the negative frequently describe the simple reversal of light areas of the picture into dark sections and vice versa, but negatives present a reversal of the complete tonal range. Moreover, the inversion of the negative is not only tonal but also spatial. Negatives show the images laterally reversed (from right to left), thus inverting the picture tonally and spatially.

In this book, I specifically engage with and study gelatin on glass negative plates, or dry plates as they are popularly known. Gelatin dry plates are glass negatives that use glass as support and gelatin as a binder. They represented a radical innovation in photography during the nineteenth century, in part due to their industrial production. In particular, dry plates shortened exposure times to less than a second compared to the longer time used in collodion or paper negatives. Besides, photographers could buy ready-to-use plates, meaning they did not have to prepare the emulsion in the studio.¹⁰ The first records of this type of negative appeared in 1871 in a publication by Richard Leach Maddox. However, it was not until 1878, after several technical improvements, that these plates were commercially introduced.¹¹ In the archives of the Rodríguez brothers and Benjamín de la Calle's studio, there are original boxes containing dry plates from the Eastman Dry Plate Company and the Lumière Brothers, which speaks to both the wide circulation of these materials and the connections of these photographers with the international photographic industry.

The invention of the negative turned photography into a potent tool. Copies could indeed have been made through the reproduction of direct positives by contact or projection—as we know we can do today with slides—if the image produced by the camera obscura was a direct positive on translucent paper.¹² But this was not the case. Hippolyte Bayard's process, which produced direct positives on paper, was not fully developed when William Henry Fox Talbot used high-quality calotypes that created inverted images. Thus, the invention of the negative enabled photography's reproducibility, and the widespread dissemination of realistic images became possible thanks to Talbot's negative/positive process. He conceived this binary relationship of photography as early as 1835 and made it fundamental to the development of the calotype.¹³

Nevertheless, Talbot's version of photography was not immediately widely used because he held a patent that made it difficult to access. Many photo historians argue this was one reason the daguerreotype

became so popular; it was available and free to practically the entire world. It was not, however, until 1851, when Frederick Scott Archer invented the glass negative wet-collodion process, that the negative/positive process commercially surpassed Daguerre's invention. From then on, photography entered a new phase in which its democratization was based on the negative's reproductive quality. This was noted in the press, instruction manuals, philosophical essays, and specialist articles.¹⁴ The negative—not the positive—challenged what Walter Benjamin called “aura” and the notion of singular authenticity. To make an image no longer unique was essential for the peculiar qualities of the medium.

It can be argued that the lack of attention negatives have received in the history of photography is a result of the historiography of the medium during the twentieth century. During the nineteenth century, however, authors and photographers alike paid detailed attention to the photographic process and thus to the negative as a constituent part of the medium. In his experiments with photographic reproduction, British scientist John Herschel—the person who coined the words *positive* and *negative* when referencing photography—played in multiple ways with the negative to produce detailed positive prints. Similarly, in his well-known essay “Doings of the Sunbeam,” American writer and physician Oliver Wendell Holmes noted how light became shadow in the making of a negative:

Stop! What is that change of color beginning at this edge, and spreading as a blush spreads over a girl's cheek? It is a border, like that round the picture, and then dawns the outline of a head, and now the eyes come out from the blank as stars from the empty sky, and the lineaments define themselves, plainly enough, yet in a strange aspect,—for where there was light in the picture we have shadow, and where there was shadow we have light. . . . This is a *negative*—not a true picture—which puts darkness for light and light for darkness. From this we can take true pictures, or *positives*.¹⁵

For Holmes, the negative was a transient moment in which an image was inverted and thus “not a true picture.” Photographic truth became available only when the positive was created. Indeed, the negative inverts the picture, but it is not a fleeting moment. Negatives are images that endure, were kept and sold by photographers, and represent a large part of nineteenth-century photographic archives today.

In Colombia, the negative also played a pivotal role in how photographers envisioned the medium. Indeed, the Rodríguez brothers, particularly Melitón, thought of photography in terms of the negative. Not only did he repaint and retouch many of the negative plates he created, but he also evaluated his work by analyzing the negatives. In his diary, he continuously refers to the number of negatives he created and their quality. For example, in a January 19, 1907, note, he stated, “The works are better in every way. Better negatives and more work.”¹⁶ In the following note from that same month, he wrote, “It [the day] ended with two negatives of children that should be very good, which I am going to develop on the spot.”¹⁷ This conception of photography as negative was crucial. The care and work in the studio were targeted toward creating excellent-quality negatives. The positive prints followed.

Since their invention, negatives were also racially coded. As noted by Darcy Grimaldo Grisby, in Holmes’s description of the making of photography, the preservation of racial difference was a subtext of his description.¹⁸ For him, a “true picture” was one of a white sitter who appears white and not “dusky,” as in a negative. The term *dusky* referred to the diminution of light but was also used to describe African Americans.¹⁹ Likewise, in 1839, John Herschel wrote in his diary that in a photographic negative, “fair women are transformed into negresses,” emphasizing the inversion of the image from a racially coded perspective.²⁰ In 1854, Henry Morley and William Henry Wills also wrote in racial terms about the process of turning negatives into positive prints: “That negro stage was not, of course, the finished portrait, it was ‘the negative’—or stereotype plate, as it were—from which, after it had been fixed with a solution of the sulfate of the peroxide of iron, any number of impressions could be taken. . . . The black face will obstruct the passage of the light and leave a white face underneath.”²¹ These analogies, commonly employed in the medium’s early years, speak to loaded language and the racially inflected ways in which photography’s negative/positive process was understood from the beginning.²² They also signal the strong relationship between race and photography, two ideas that emerged in parallel during the nineteenth century and fed upon one another to install racial segregation through “scientific” perspectives. This issue has been widely studied, particularly the relationships between eugenics, anthropometry, and photography.

But rather than focusing on scientific photography, in this book, I examine the history of studio portraiture at the turn of the twentieth

century to trace a parallel history of racial photography through which a construction of whiteness as an ideal standard in society was achieved. Considering the loaded racial history of the negative, I understand the negative not only in its material and physical form but also as a methodology that enables a different perspective. As noted by Tanya Sheehan, photography functions—beyond a technology of representation—as an instrument and metaphor for race relations.²³ Therefore, in this book, the negative is also understood as a metaphor for those categorized as the Other. Negatives are linguistically charged with a pejorative reading, just as poor, black, Indigenous, and nonnormative bodies have been relegated and associated with negative connotations. However, what happens when we think positively about those negative subjects? When we look at them from the reverse side of both photography and history? What happens when we understand the negative as a productive way of thinking through photography?

This methodology of the negative, as I shall call it, is an approach that invites the spectator to view the images studied here from the other side, that is, from the reverse. That other side is the reversal not only of the image but also of history. Thinking through the negative implies a trifold approach: material, symbolic, and spatial. Thus, in the following chapters, I return to the negative and use it as a concept to analyze the photographs through one or more of these approaches. For example, the negative is materially and symbolically understood in chapters 2, 3, and 4. In these chapters, I focus on the representation of subjects considered negative or positive by Antioquian society. I analyze how photography reinforced or challenged preconceived ideas of whiteness and alterity by appropriating local and international representational styles and themes, such as pictorialism, Orientalism, and *costumbrista* painting. In the last chapter, I focus on the negative space of the photographic image through an analysis of the backdrops used in studio photography. In other words, I study the negative from a spatial perspective. Just as negatives have played a minor role in photography's historiography, the negative space of the photographic image is rarely analyzed. Carefully chosen painted backdrops are the negative space of studio photographs. These backdrops, by themselves, already connote certain ideas. But when looked at and analyzed in juxtaposition to the sitters, their meaning expands, locating the portrayed persons in a very specific context that speaks of the racial morale of the *raza antioqueña*.

Moreover, when one looks at the photographic negative of these images—the object itself—hand-drawn additions appear on the surface of the glass plate, subtly altering the depicted background and thus its meaning. These additions respond to the photographer's effort to contain what Christopher Pinney has called a space of "unruly contingencies," that is, the photographic surface onto which everything that stood in front of the camera is imprinted with more information than the photographer can control.²⁴ The idea of photography as contingency was first enunciated by Walter Benjamin in his "Little History of Photography" and later developed by Roland Barthes in *Camera Lucida*. For Benjamin, contingency is the "here and now, with which reality has, so to speak, seared through the image-character of the photograph."²⁵ It is the unwanted element that, even in the most controlled of all the photographic practices, such as the *mise-en-scène* of studio photography, sneaks in. For Barthes, that contingent element is usually where he finds the punctum of the picture, the "shock," the "wound," which usually does not correspond to the photographer's intention. I argue that the intervention of negatives is a step in the process of controlling this "madness of photography," or its "exorbitance," as Barthes called it. Negatives reveal the diverse ways used to modify photography before the invention of Photoshop. With this in mind, we must ask ourselves why negatives have been secondary or supplementary to photography's history. One scope of this book is to question the hierarchies of the elements analyzed in photography and show that photographic history can be constructed by considering other aspects of the picture.

Examining the negatives has both advantages and disadvantages. The major inconvenience is not having access to the final printed image created by the photographer for the client. Indeed, this is a larger issue in the history of photography in Latin America. Perhaps the most well-known case is that of the Peruvian Martín Chambi, who toned his prints in shades of red, blue, or brown and sometimes even airbrushed them. The photographer and his contemporaries held these tinted images in high regard, and they became a commercial success. However, these pictures were not the ones that later became known to the larger international public. The images curators and critics picked and showed internationally were modern copies made from the original negatives after Chambi's death. These new copies aligned with modern photography's black-and-white aesthetic but did not reflect the photographer's original intentions. Indeed, when Edward Ranney curated the first exhibition of Chambi's work

outside South America—at the University of New Mexico Art Museum in Albuquerque—Chambi's toned vintage prints were removed just days before the opening. Those photographs did not appeal to modern tastes.²⁶

Likewise, printing digital scans created today from the negatives used by these photographers permits the enlargement of the photographs to enormous dimensions. Contemporary prints are thus manipulated to appeal to new tastes, distorting the original function of the photographs, which invited close inspection and physical intimacy. These photographers would have never considered printing their pictures life-size because their function and circulation spaces differed from today's art world. In Alois Riegl's terms, we are assigning them "present-day values." That is, we are not considering them in their original historical context, but putting them "on a par with a recently completed modern creation."²⁷

Access to de la Calle's and Fotografía Rodríguez's photographs through digital scans has mainly enabled an understanding of their photographs as images, not as physical objects. The disembodied reading of the photographs has been further worsened by the lack of vintage copies and the relatively easy access to the scanned versions of the negatives. This use and reading of the photographs is a consequence of cultural shifts that tend to privilege content over the aesthetic, social, and sensory dimensions of the object of study.²⁸ This approach has obscured fundamental aspects of photography, such as its uses, functions, and other material dimensions of the photographic object that exceed visual representation.²⁹ "A photograph is a three-dimensional thing, not a two-dimensional image," noted Elizabeth Edwards.³⁰ This claim to think about photography—and art history more broadly—from a perspective that embraces both the visual and the material can be traced back to Alois Riegl's ideas when he separated the visual aspects of art from its haptic elements, establishing a framework that positioned artistic processes on a spectrum between the act of seeing and the act of touching.³¹ I argue that one way of bringing this dual dimension back to the analysis of these photographs is through serious consideration of the negatives.

The analysis of negatives points to social, political, and economic circumstances that have not been fully considered in the histories told so far. For example, photographers carefully retouched many of the photographs of this period for different purposes, such as altering the color of skin, eliminating some elements from the pictures, or adding artifice and effects that were not part of the original shot. This manipulation of the photographs,

usually visible only on the negative plate, completely changes the original understanding of the images and raises questions related to the transparency of the photographic object.³² It also questions the indexical nature of the specific positive versions that result from a negative.

In *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes famously wrote that in a photograph the referent always adheres. I argue that it indeed adheres, but in positive/negative-based photography it adheres to the negative and not necessarily to the positive. He also noted that this “adherence makes it very difficult to focus on Photography” and not on what the photograph is depicting.³³ Here, I want to propose that engaging with negatives is a strategy to “focus on Photography.” Through the inversion of tonal range and spatial direction, negatives make evident photography as mediation while maintaining its deictic language, contingency, and exorbitance. The negative reveals the photographic image as a photograph.

Another advantage of analyzing the negative plates is that it allows the possibility of looking beyond the final image. This *beyond* should be understood here in two senses: that of Roland Barthes and that of Ariella Azoulay. Barthes suggests that the “unruly punctum” of the photograph is in this “subtle beyond,” in the potential that certain photographs have in launching “a desire beyond what it permits us to see.”³⁴ To a certain degree, the negative points to this *beyond*—to an area of greater contingency that is noisier than its positive version. But this *beyond* is also that of the depicted scene itself. It is captured on the negative and usually cut out of the positive print. By looking at the negatives, we have access to uncropped versions of the photographs, revealing elements that lie beyond the backdrop of the settings, including other props, the arrangement of the studios, assistants, and other technical equipment, as seen, for example, in a photograph of Manuel J. Echavarría (fig. 1.3). We also see the inscriptions and other interventions the photographers did on the negative plates. In other words, we have access to the unwanted aspects of the photographic images and, hence, to other central elements of the process of constructing the picture. This is the *beyond* proposed by Azoulay: a beyond that allows us to see the relationships established by the photographic event and, in the negative, become more evident.³⁵

The reading and understanding of the final positive copies are often complicated when analyzing negative-based photography. The negative counterpart of the picture brings about other aspects of the photographic image that are usually not taken into consideration but—in



I.3. Fotografía Rodríguez, Manuel J. Echavarría, 1896. Digital positive from original gelatin dry plate, 13 × 9 cm. Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín / Archivo fotográfico.

some instances, such as the ones analyzed in this book—affect the thorough understanding of the complete picture. I argue that examining photography should also engage these different instances of its production. Unfortunately, in most cases, re-creating the moment of the shot is impossible, leaving scholars with only the last two stages of the picture: the negative and the positive print. However, there is a certain bias toward privileging the latter because it is the last step of a chain process. However, what happens when the negative unveils aspects of the image that are not visible in the positive version?

The issue of the fragmentation of photography also plays in the opposite direction. What happens when the positive version distances greatly from its negative counterpart? Where lies the intention of the photographer? It is usually assumed that the positive copy is the one the photographer signed off as final and that the negatives were never intended to be looked at. This is an issue at stake in the analysis of the photographs in this project. A few versions of positive prints that have been found were, for example, hand-painted and cropped. This variation of the pictures opens another set of questions regarding the final version of the image. One might even wonder if there is something like a final version of a photograph. If

one can produce several positive copies of a picture from a single negative and alter them, which is the original? These considerations inevitably take us back to the negative, as it seems to be a breaking point in the production of images, and nineteenth-century photographers were aware of this. Then why should we overlook histories of photography that do not engage with the final version of the images? Is it equally valid to create a history of photography through the negative version of the images?

If we agree that the photographic medium is fragmented—divided between the physical action of the camera, the selection of the image, the editing process, and the final positive print—then the negative as a point of reference might be just as important as, if not more important than, its positive version. Indeed, we can argue that the negative is closer to the photographic event, that it is the bearer of greater contingency, and that it embodies a noisier or rawer version of the photographic positive, which both photographers and sitters tried to tame, never really fully succeeding.³⁶ The negative can capture either too much or too little. Retouching the faces of sitters responded to a rejection of what photography captured: wrinkles, freckles, and pores that the sitters didn't want to see in their likenesses. On other occasions, it captured too little, and additions such as missing props and painterly effects were added.³⁷ It is precisely because it is an integral part of the photographic event that I consider the negative a critical aspect of understanding photography.

Although this method might be problematic precisely because we are not dealing with the final image, it sheds light on other issues that shaped and forged the construction of identities in modern Latin America. It also clarifies theoretical questions regarding photography's ontology and the construction of the photographic image. It forces us to question where exactly the image lies or if any state is more complete than another. As noted by Geoffrey Batchen, rethinking the history of photography through the negative points to troubling questions such as, "What exactly is a photograph? Is it just the negative, the original indexical trace of the world depicted? Or is it a single positive 'master' print generated from that negative? Or does a photograph necessarily comprise the two of them, symbolically joined in an eternal union?"³⁸

These questions regarding the definition of photography from the point of view of the negative take me to questions regarding the definitions of race in light of whiteness. In Latin America, the latter concept involves an array of positive traits that generate profitable outcomes for

people, communities, and social practices deemed white or aligned with whiteness in the eyes of society.³⁹ Attributes that deviate from this conception are undesirable. The concept of whiteness, like the concept of race, is an idea, not a fact. It has been appropriated and implemented in different contexts and societies to create relationships of power. As a concept, whiteness is also relative and subjective. For example, the notions of white and black in Latin America do not correspond to those of white and black in Europe or the United States. Whereas in the United States, a person with any visible signs of black ancestry is identified as black, in Latin America, only people who look identifiably African will be regarded as black. The opposite happens with the concept of white. While in the United States only people who appear to have a pure Caucasian lineage are considered white, in Latin America, the concept is broader and includes mixed-race people with a light(er) but not exclusively white skin color.

Indeed, the concept of whiteness is complex, frequently exceeding physical appearance, although not abandoning it altogether. During the nineteenth century in Colombia's Andean region, whiteness was also defined in terms of beauty, material consumption (mostly European material culture), and morality. In this sense, the concept of whiteness can be regulated, altered, and even lost. Yet, despite its flexibility, whiteness as a place of enunciation is validated as superior.⁴⁰ This is noticeable in the photographs analyzed in this book. In some cases, the concept of whiteness and white privilege is visible not in the color of the skin of the depicted subjects but in the morality traits that they express and in the social distinction of the sitters—usually seen in the material goods they wear and the behaviors and poses they perform for the camera. For example, in the negatives of pictures such as *Emilia Obregón* and *Carolina Carvallo*, the photographer decided not to retouch the sitter's skin color and instead focus on the theatricality of the scenes emphasizing the material and symbolic aspects that relate the sitters to a privileged upper and whiter class (figs. 2.2 and 2.5). I explore these ideas more deeply in chapter 2, where I analyze these particular photos.

Besides the racial concepts of black and white, a third one was introduced, usually used to refer to mixed-race people. The concept of *mestizo*, or mixed-race person, goes back to colonial times and has complex bifurcations, which I will not address here. There were dozens of categories used to refer to the different race-mixing processes among the three major groups of people during the Spanish colonial era: Indigenous,

African, and Spanish. During the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, *mestizo* was a mutable concept which, as Joanne Rappaport has explained, included fleeting conditions that ranged from occupation to behavioral practices and more stable situations also subject to change, such as place of residence, gender, and religion.⁴¹ Mestizo identity was not a stable marker during the colonial period and depended on the labeling person and the purpose of such labeling.⁴² As opposed to the eighteenth-century *casta* painting system developed in New Spain (today Mexico), in New Granada (today Colombia) there were no such visual representations of race mixing, and there was no system for classifying *mestizaje* processes. *Casta* paintings depicted an idealized projection of racial combinations that appeared during the colonization process and usually emphasized Spanish supremacy.⁴³ They indicated, for example, how through the mixture of races over generations, an Indigenous person could become Spanish. *Casta* paintings have become the most significant and more salient visual examples of these complex processes of *mestizaje* in the Spanish Americas. Still, they do not represent the situation of all the Spanish colonies and, more importantly, they do not represent the realities of New Spain's society. They depict a projection for European consumption.⁴⁴ As noted by Rappaport, "'Casta,' the terminology used in colonial Mexico . . . to refer to a system of socio-racial categories including 'Indian,' 'mestizo,' 'mulatto,' and so on, does not appear in the archival record of the Nuevo Reino until the eighteenth century, and then only as an umbrella term used to refer to those who were not Spaniards, Indians, or black slaves; in the sixteenth-century Andes 'casta' referred to lineage in a more general sense."⁴⁵

During the colonial period in Colombia, visual representations of race mixing—such as *casta* paintings—were not a popular genre. Explicit racial depictions of this type emerged only in the nineteenth century with the *costumbrista* painting—a genre intended to depict local customs and traditions. In this type of painting, people were not depicted as individual subjects but as types. The most prominent examples of this genre in Colombia are the plates produced as part of Agustín Codazzi's Chorographic Commission, the country's first and largest geographic exploration, which took place in the 1850s. The commission intended not only to survey the landscape of the newly formed nation but also to document the types and idiosyncrasies of its inhabitants.⁴⁶ To complete this task, Codazzi hired different draftsmen—Henry Price, Carmelo Fernández, and Manuel María Paz—the artists that did the well-known plates. When representing



I.4. Manuel María Paz, *Mestizos de Cartago en una venta*, 1853. Watercolor on paper, 31 × 24 cm. Biblioteca Nacional de Colombia.

the diverse population of the country, the illustrations emphasized the different races as seen, for example, in *Mestizos de Cartago en una venta* (Mestizos from Cartago in a shop, fig. I.4). The surprising aspect of this plate is the fact that the sitters, which according to the caption are mixed-raced persons, are represented with fairly white skin. However, other aspects of the image point to their nonwhiteness and, therefore, to their negative identity: the bare feet of both sitters, the clothes they wear, and the ceramic vessels they possess.

Today, when we think about the concept of mestizo, what comes to mind is the idea of a mixed-race person, usually with Indigenous heritage. However, the notion of *mestizaje* was fluid and distinct from modern racial discourses. During the nineteenth century in Colombia, *mestizaje* described the process of becoming white rather than one of race mixture. The cultural imaginary in nineteenth-century Colombia saw race mixing as a path toward physical and cultural whiteness. In the official documentation and the fictional stories of the time studied, none of the subjects were classified or referred to as mestizos. This notion only appeared in the visual representations of types or public discourses encompassing larger population groups. Conversely, the process of *mestizaje* played a

central role in national discourses, allowing the formation of the nation itself.⁴⁷

I have not found nineteenth-century photographs of types that describe their subjects as mestizos. This intermediate racial category was not verbally announced in the pictures' accompanying texts, but it became visible in the "invisible" part of the photographic process: the negative. The retouching performed on many of the plates studied in this book speaks precisely to the process of *mestizaje*, leaving traces of a stigma that had to be improved or overcome on the surface of the negatives. But retouching was not the only way to visually announce the process of becoming white. In other instances, this process was not so literal, and it materialized in photography through the sitters' poses, clothing, props, backdrops, and the themes of the performed scenes.

The meaning of race shifts and changes according to the context and culture in which it develops. In Colombia, *race* was understood as *lineage* until the eighteenth century. Rather than focusing on a person's color, what marked the difference was status or religion.⁴⁸ People's social standing depended on purity of blood: a genealogy of descendants that traced its pure Christian past.⁴⁹ By the nineteenth century, race was considered a type. In other words, until the 1800s, race was a category that referred to a line of descendants from a single common ancestor, whereas by the nineteenth century, it had transformed into the concept that races could be divided into types: human beings with innate and permanent qualities passed from generation to generation could be classified based on this shared history of inheritance. In the twentieth century, conversely, race took on different connotations. The understanding of race as a permanent, unchangeable feature changed—partly because of Darwin's theories of evolution, which determined that breeding populations could adapt. This new scientific discovery paved the way for eugenics and the understanding of certain races as inferior. Scientific racism was later challenged through its own techniques, such as the anthropometric research of anthropologist Franz Boas and, more recently, Mendel's genetic discoveries, which finally forced the scientific community to determine that races do not exist and are indeed social constructions.⁵⁰

Yet, knowing that race is a social construct does not mean it has no real, tangible consequences. Races are social categories of great tenacity and power, affecting large portions of the world population positively and negatively.⁵¹ Although, relatively recently, some scientists have argued

that races are social constructions built on phenotypical variations, that is, disparities in physical appearance, such a concept is also misguided. The features on which these variations are based are a small selection of recognizable physical characteristics that show continuity over generations, such as height, weight, and hair and skin color, but also, as stated by Peter Wade, those that “correspond to Europeans in their colonial histories.”⁵² In other words, the phenotypical variations selected to define racial types are also social constructs. Thus, the concept of race reflects a history of European thought about difference rather than one deploying objective scientific truth independent of its social context.⁵³

The concept of race that emerged in Antioquia during the second half of the nineteenth century and peaked during the early twentieth is a mix of the notion of race as type and that of race as eugenics. It is interesting, however, to see how in Colombia, the concept of race is not addressed through the usual notions of black or white but is traversed by the symbolic process of the racialization of the regions.⁵⁴ In Colombia, race is not a national concept; the regions are allotted racial identities that determine the hierarchical organization of the departments. Territories in the Andean part of the country, including Antioquia, occupy the upper section of the pyramid and are considered of greater morality and progress (white) and thus positive. Whereas those in warmer climates, such as the Cauca region and the Caribbean coast, are relegated to the lower parts of the hierarchical structure. The regional identities of the warmer climate regions are usually associated with negative connotations: disorder, backwardness, and danger (mestizos or black). For this reason, the representation of races in Colombia is linked not to the concept of the nation but to that of the region, and Antioquia is the area with the best-defined racial identity.⁵⁵

The Department of Antioquia is in the northwestern part of the country. It has an area of 63,612 square kilometers. A small section of its northern territory borders the Caribbean Sea, but most of it lies in the Andes Mountains (fig. 1.5).⁵⁶ Medellín is the capital city and occupies a valley surrounded by rugged mountain ranges. Until 1914, it was incredibly isolated from the outside world and only accessible by mule. In 1812, Medellín had a population of 13,755. By the end of the nineteenth century, it had grown to 37,237; and by 1928, it had reached 120,000 inhabitants.⁵⁷ It went from the fourth most populated city in the country to the second one, with only Bogotá surpassing its numbers. The process of *mestizaje* was particularly

I.5. Map of Colombia, showing the location of the Department of Antioquia. Wikipedia.



strong in Antioquia. Although black enslaved populations were brought to the region to work in the gold mines, they made up less than 1 percent of the population by the mid-nineteenth century. This is surprising considering Antioquia borders the Department of Chocó, Colombia's region with the highest percentage of black people. The Indigenous population, on the other hand, was almost completely devastated, and the few survivors were confined to special reservations.

In Antioquia, as in many other Latin American regions, regional racial identities and nationalist discourses intertwined, turning racial discourses into political ones.⁵⁸ One of the major challenges posed by this situation was the risk of naturalizing these discourses and assuming them to be unchangeable truths. Yet, the notions of white, black, or mestizo are not fixed categories and, most times, gain meaning in relation to others, such as class and gender. Indeed, the idea of whiteness in the concept of the *raza antioqueña* emerged from the intersection with other discourses that privileged male subjectivity, Catholic religious beliefs, and class differentiation. The photographs analyzed in this book point precisely to these intertwined ideas and show the complex bifurcations that such a

category entails. Although the rationale behind different notions of race may differ, the ideas are invalid because, as previously stated, every racial construction is fiction. These fixed definitions of race tell powerful narratives with actual consequences for the region and nation they represent but also for how individual subjects understand themselves and, thus, for the distribution of power. The first chapter of this book deals with this topic in more depth. However, the Antioquian race seen through the concept of the negative ultimately becomes the book's common thread.

This book, thus, embraces the negative as both an object that is closer to the photographic event and as a space where ideas can be inscribed after the photograph is taken and reproduced through the negative/positive process. One can draw an equation between the reproduction of an image through the negative/positive process (i.e., the material negative) and the reproduction of ideologies (i.e., the metaphorical negative) that are ultimately embedded in the negative plates. My argument is that these ideologies are later inscribed on the image. I assert that this is done through direct intervention on the negative plates (adding or removing information) or through the inscription of ideological ideas that come from the frameworks in which these images circulated, namely the racial morale of the *raza antioqueña*. These postevent ideas are not predetermined; they can change, and new ideas can be imprinted on these photographs, which is one of the aims of my project. Taking this into consideration, the negative can inhabit this apparent contradiction: being closer to the photographic event while simultaneously constituting a postevent writing space.

The Photo Studios: Benjamín de la Calle and Fotografía Rodríguez

In 1898, Benjamín de la Calle, a newcomer to the photographic world, wrote a letter—later published with its reply in the newspaper *El Espectador*—to Horacio Marino Rodríguez (1866–1931), an already recognized artist-photographer in Medellín, asking him to assess his work. De la Calle inquired if he could open a photographic studio in “any advanced society with the confidence of satisfying the most refined tastes.”⁵⁹ Rodríguez replied with admiration, acknowledging de la Calle's photographs as some of “the best in the country in terms of good taste and exquisite execution”

and confessing that some of them even “made [him] feel envy.”⁶⁰ This conversation might seem paradigmatic as it evidences a connection between two of the three photographers involved in this history—Benjamín de la Calle, Horacio Marino Rodríguez, and his younger brother Melitón Rodríguez—whose production would later provide the foundation for two of the most significant turn-of-the-century photographic archives in Colombia, if not in Latin America. Despite their geographic isolation and the lack of museums, galleries, and institutions, these photographers created a compelling visual record focused on portraiture, one of the region’s most diverse. For clarity throughout the book, I refer to the Rodríguez brothers by their first names, while I use the standardized reference by the last name when dealing with Benjamín de la Calle’s work.

The photographers were the first to recognize the power of portraiture, as reflected in their self-portraits. As de la Calle stated in his letter of 1898, he aimed “to satisfy the most refined tastes” and simultaneously climb the social ladder.⁶¹ This was not a neutral statement, as it came from an inexperienced and little-known photographer who had yet to realize such aspirations. For him, photography was the best way to achieve this goal, as seen, for example, in one of his most outstanding self-portraits (fig. 1.6).⁶² Standing in front of a poorly painted background, de la Calle wears an unusual outfit for an early twentieth-century, middle-class photographer. Sporting a bowler hat, a three-piece suit with a dotted vest, and a white bow tie, he holds a pair of gloves in his right hand while staring away from the camera. He stands in contrapposto, imitating a classic art historical pose, making a statement about his status in society. Through the pose, de la Calle claimed that even though he was a photographer who arrived in the city in the early 1890s from a small town high in the Antioquian mountains, he indeed had “refined taste” and was aware of the stylistic tropes and signifiers of the upper classes. This idea was ultimately a European appropriation that conveyed the beliefs of the white male elite. To fit in, de la Calle not only performed these ideas but also attempted to live his public life according to the assumptions of what refined taste was.

This image is a visual witness to his struggle for social acceptance and his radical approach to photography. De la Calle was born in 1869 in Yarumal, Antioquia. He studied photography with Emiliano Mejía (1864–1937), a *carte de visite* photographer who had studied in Paris and offered not only lessons in photography but also drawing, painting, and French language courses in his studio, located on Calle Pichincha in Medellín.⁶³



DUKE

1.6. Benjamín de la Calle, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1920. Digital positive from gelatin dry plate, 25 × 20 cm. Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín / Archivo fotográfico.

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

After studying with Mejía, de la Calle returned to his hometown, where he established a photo studio with his brother Eduardo.⁶⁴ At the beginning of his career, he worked between Yarumal and Medellín until 1899, when he moved to the department's capital and opened a studio in the Guayaquil neighborhood. This part of Medellín developed parallel to, but separate from, the more cosmopolitan lifestyle of the historically more affluent downtown neighborhood. Guayaquil became a commercial neighborhood; within it, a distinct set of "values, beliefs, mythologies, and ways of thinking" emerged.⁶⁵ Although extremely productive and in many aspects successful, throughout his career, de la Calle struggled financially, as demonstrated both by the various letters he addressed to the city's council requesting tax reductions and by a classification in 1911 of the photographic establishments in Medellín in which his studio appeared as a "second class" establishment—in other words, a studio of lower prestige.⁶⁶

In the same spirit manifested in his self-portrait, de la Calle's desire to belong to a higher social class was further evidenced by adding *de la* to his last name in 1909. The addition of a preposition to the surname underscored a heritage of illustrious ascendance, Spanish in most cases. By August of that year, he was signing his advertisements in the newspapers as "Benjamín de la Calle" instead of the simple "Benjamín Calle" that had preceded it.⁶⁷ This gesture could be seen as a further reflection of his desire to portray himself as a sophisticated gentleman of his time. Medellín's elite's urge to differentiate themselves from other social classes led them to develop a strict behavioral code embodied in the discourse of *urbanidad y etiqueta* (civility and etiquette).⁶⁸ The correct choice of clothing, for example, transmitted a message of good taste, education, and sophistication. No one who aspired to be part of the elite had the liberty to dress however they desired; they had to follow strict rules that reflected their educational background and social standing.⁶⁹ For de la Calle, a man sometimes described as "extravagant and complex," and who struggled to keep his homosexuality a secret in a highly conservative city controlled by the beliefs of the Catholic Church, following these codes was crucial.⁷⁰ The way he dressed and posed turned into a form of performing a constructed identity and presenting a latent self, which was enhanced and disseminated through photography, a medium that circulated and communicated a certain subjectivity as representation.

An example of the radicality of his images and specifically of this performativity, enhanced through the manipulation of photography, was the

addition of a painted flower to the lapel of the suit in his self-portrait—a detail missing in the original shot but later added to the negative (fig. 1.7). Although the addition of the flower seems initially a superficial detail, it was decisive. Carlos Coriolano Amador—the wealthiest man in the city, whose investments were considered outrageous at the time—was known for always wearing a red carnation on the lapel of his suit, as seen in a photograph taken by de la Calle himself in 1914 (fig. 1.8). In this image, Amador poses wearing a three-piece suit with a white shirt and tie, a top hat, and a cane in his hands, in a posture very similar to the one de la Calle emulated in his self-portrait taken in 1920, after Amador's death in 1919. Some of his contemporaries noticed de la Calle's apparent intention to imitate Amador's manners, as stated by Roberto Álvarez, a merchant who declared that he saw de la Calle "several times on the street with a light-colored suit and a carnation on the lapel, in the manner of Coriolano Amador's style."⁷¹

But the painted flower on the lapel of de la Calle's suit may have referred not only to Amador but also to de la Calle's homosexuality. As is well known, the green carnation became a queer symbol worldwide after Oscar Wilde presented *Lady Windermere's Fan* in 1892.⁷² Men who wore it identified with the dandy: a fashionable, flamboyant, and sexually ambiguous man. It can be said that in this self-portrait, de la Calle embodies the dandy through the pose, the outfit, and the carnation. The addition of the flower to the negative plate is a way of reaffirming his sexuality, albeit through a very subtle gesture. The visualization of such a symbol opened up a political field in which nonnormative gender identification began to take shape, to be represented, and to be visually inscribed. This is more evident in the photographs he took throughout his career of cross-dressed men and women, which are discussed in more detail in chapter 3. But the simple detail of adding a flower to the negative of his self-portrait is a good example to introduce both the radicality of his practice and the importance of looking at negatives.

The exemplary quality of de la Calle's photography permitted him to work with many of the elite, as seen in the pictures of Medellín's upper class and politicians of the time, which he photographed later in his career. He also worked for the police, creating interesting pictures of criminals, which is explored in chapter 3. However, he never abandoned his interest in portraying and giving voice to the urban Other, that is, the peasants who migrated to the city, the Afro-Colombian population from the Pacific



I.7. Benjamín de la Calle, *Self-Portrait*, ca. 1920. Detail from negative on gelatin dry plate. Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín / Archivo fotográfico.

I.8. Benjamín de la Calle, *Carlos Coriolano Amador*, 1914. Digital positive from gelatin dry plate, 18 × 13 cm. Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín / Archivo fotográfico.



DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

coast, and the prostitutes and cross-dressers that inhabited his neighborhood, among others. By openly assuming his sexual identity, de la Calle signaled his identification with a community that experienced political and intellectual forms of marginalization and segregation.⁷³ To counterbalance this position, he sought approval from the establishment as a professional photographer, a task he achieved relatively quickly after settling permanently in Medellín. Proof of his success as a photographer is found in the pictures he took for President Rafael Reyes (1849–1921), who visited Medellín in 1908. Reyes was one of Colombia’s first presidents to leave his seat in Bogotá and travel around the country during his time in office. Part of his political program included documenting these journeys.⁷⁴ Photography played a fundamental role in this program, as Reyes understood the power of images as visual propaganda for his government. The photographs were later published in one of the first photo books in Colombia’s history, *República de Colombia: Excursiones presidenciales* (Republic of Colombia: Presidential excursions), from 1909.⁷⁵ The official photographer of the president’s journey around the country, and later editor of the book, was the chief of the national gendarmerie, Pedro A. Pedraza. His Kodak camera captured most of the photographs that accompany the publication.

It seems, however, that during his sojourn in Medellín, Reyes hired de la Calle to cover his visit. A letter written by the president—published in the newspaper *El Bateo* in 1908—states that “Colombia’s incumbent president greets Mr. D. Benjamín de Calle [sic], thanks him profusely for the photographic works executed during his short stay in Medellín, and hereby recommends him as a skillful photographer and accomplished gentleman.”⁷⁶ Although de la Calle received no credit in the final publication, the images seem to align with de la Calle’s style when compared with the photographs he took of other significant events in the city, such as the arrival of President Pedro Nel Ospina in 1922 (fig. 1.9). The bird’s-eye view that allowed him to capture the multitudes that congregated in the main plazas of Medellín to witness the grandiloquence of the occasions characterized de la Calle’s pictures of public events.⁷⁷

By 1942, Lisandro Ochoa, a chronicler of the time, described de la Calle as a “practical and consecrated photographer,” thus acknowledging the recognition the photographer had achieved throughout his career.⁷⁸ Yet de la Calle’s best work is not what he created for Medellín’s elite, presidents, or politicians but his portraits of anonymous people whose character, spirit, and aspirations were frozen in time through the photographer’s



I.9. Benjamín de la Calle, *Untitled (Plaza de Cisneros Pedro Nel Ospina)*, 1922. Digital positive from gelatin dry plate, 9 × 12 cm. Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín / Archivo fotográfico.

profound interest in documenting a different city. If representing likeness was, for some, photography's main achievement, de la Calle's work surpassed it. His portraits do not reveal likenesses but resemblances, that is, he documented the character and inner spirit of the people inhabiting a city seeking progress and civilization but also a sense of belonging.⁷⁹ This profound ambivalence is perhaps what best characterizes de la Calle's oeuvre.

Fotografía Rodríguez, the Rodríguez brothers' studio, gravitated instead toward establishing photography in the realm of the fine arts and their work as part of the hegemonic culture of the time. While de la Calle rarely pursued artistic aspirations, the Rodríguezes' studio was born with them. Horacio Marino Rodríguez and his cousin, the painter Francisco Antonio Cano (1865–1935), founded it around 1889 under the name Foto Cano y Rodríguez. Cano would become one of Colombia's most recognized nineteenth-century painters, an acknowledgment rooted in his close kinship to photography.⁸⁰ By 1891, Cano had left the photo business and Horacio Marino joined forces with his brother Melitón, opening Fotografía y Pintura Rodríguez y Jaramillo with an investor. This



I.10. Fotografía Rodríguez, Horacio Marino y Melitón Rodríguez, 1896. Digital positive from gelatin dry plate, 18 × 13 cm. Biblioteca Pública Piloto de Medellín / Archivo fotográfico.

studio eventually became Fotografía Rodríguez, perhaps the most celebrated photographic atelier in the city. Around 1898, Horacio Marino left the photographic enterprise to immerse himself in other projects—such as the publication of the first photogravures in the region in the magazine *El Montañés*—and later became one of the city’s most prominent architects.⁸¹ Besides his intellectual curiosity, which permeated many spheres of the arts in the region, one of his most significant contributions was the publication of the first photography manual written in Spanish for the Colombian public. The book, *Diez y ocho lecciones de fotografía* (Eighteen photography lessons), was published in 1897, just before he left the photo business. His younger brother Melitón took over the studio, producing some of Antioquia’s most celebrated images during his thirty-year career.

A dual self-portrait from 1896 of the Rodríguez brothers best exemplifies the characteristics of their work (fig. I.10). The two photographers pose against a plain backdrop while holding a book in their hands, marking their status as intellectuals in Medellín’s elite society. Horacio Marino, the older brother, sits on the armrest, looking away, while Melitón stares attentively at the publication they are holding. They both wear modern

dark suits, white shirts, and pocket watches, identifiable by the chains that contrast against their dark clothing. These elements were characteristic of the men of distinction and elegance they repeatedly photographed and whose interests they reflected.

If we understand the self-portrait as a mediation between the photographer's self and his audience, the Rodríguez brothers' image functioned as the materialization of this definition. The photographers present themselves not as artisans but as intellectuals, reflecting a concern with their professional identity and elevating their social standing. They portray themselves as educated, refined, and cultured men, relating their interests with those of an emerging group of thinkers, which differed from the purely artisanal work to which they were previously related. Their more sober style contrasts dramatically with de la Calle's elaborate, almost theatrical manner of portraying himself, which required numerous props and an exaggerated pose.

The Rodríguez brothers came from a tradition of marble gravestone carvers, a practice that their father pursued for many years and which Melitón continued during the early part of his photographic career. However, the family's open-mindedness and interest in spiritualism (a practice condemned by the Catholic Church) led to financial hardships and intense conflicts with the ecclesiastical authorities, who even prohibited their services to the public.⁸² These circumstances drove them to turn to different practices and adopt photography as their chief source of income while distancing themselves from spiritualism. It is presumed that the Rodríguez brothers learned photography from their uncle, Dr. Ricardo Roldán, who trained as a medical doctor in Paris during the mid-nineteenth century and worked as a photography assistant in one of the countless ateliers of the city to support himself.⁸³ They also studied photographic publications, especially those produced in France, such as *La pratique en photographie* and *L'art en photographie*, both by Frédéric Dillaye, thus adopting the French tradition as their primary reference.⁸⁴

They explicitly visualized their appropriation of a French style of artistic portraiture in their self-portrait. The sober background, as opposed to de la Calle's excessively theatrical backdrop, parallels their work with that of French masters such as Nadar or Étienne Carjat, who opted for a style in which the character of the sitter was the center of the composition, without an abundance of props. The personification of the Rodríguez brothers as members of the intellectual elite seems less artificial

than de la Calle's effort to portray himself as a member of high society. Indeed, this constructed identity was concomitant with the Rodríguez brothers' new social stature. By the turn of the century, they were wholly absorbed within the circle of intellectuals who would develop a series of racial theories and identity discourses to explain the region's rapid economic growth and its impulse toward progress and to be civilized.

In their images, one sees an intense interest in producing photographs with artistic intent, especially through the appropriation of pictorialist strategies, such as the slightly blurred effect intended to imitate painting finishes or the creation of *tableaux vivants*. Their aesthetic project was utterly intertwined with the profound obsession with beauty that still characterizes the idiosyncrasy of the people in Colombia, particularly in Medellín.⁸⁵ Although beauty is a topic that has concerned different societies throughout history, the fixation on the topic in Colombia could be explained as a counterbalance to the beast, that is, violence, racism, and poverty.⁸⁶ Beauty, thus, emerged as another concept that, attempting to obscure the horrifying reality of the country with a positive image, promoted and encouraged patriarchal values and traditional gender roles. Moreover, beauty was codified in terms of whiteness. As noted by Mercedes López Rodríguez, beauty was part of the processes of racial differentiation: "The body and physical appearance . . . occupy the imagination of writers and artists, building an argumentative circle in which white people are more beautiful and, therefore, morally superior, so that whoever is beautiful and moral is considered white."⁸⁷ This phenomenon is clearly seen in the photographs studied in this book, particularly in the pictures of women taken by the Rodríguez brothers and discussed in chapter 2.

There was a profusion of articles and advertisements in newspapers and magazines promoting not only beauty products but also strategies to abolish the ugly, as illustrated, for example, in an article titled "No habrá feos en el Taller de la Belleza [*sic*]" (There won't be ugly people in the beauty workshop) from the newspaper *El Bateo* in 1907.⁸⁸ The brief article intended to promote new beauty products that could improve the skin, either by eliminating the holes left by smallpox or by "reforming the physiognomy" of the skin—a set of "corrections" also sought through the retouching of photographs.⁸⁹ It is no surprise then that photography played a critical role in perpetuating these values since the photographer

could alter the images to satisfy the client's requests. In particular, there was a deep interest in changing the facial appearance and skin tone. As a chronicler of the time stated in the first short history of photography in Antioquia, the clientele had sundry demands: "ugly ladies who want to look pretty, one-eyed and cross-eyed people who want to appear with good eyes, whites who do not feel comfortable with the shadows, and blacks who must look white."⁹⁰ Fotografía Rodríguez deliberately took advantage of photography's alleged transparency—its most powerful rhetorical device—to convey the ideals of an identity's ideology.⁹¹ Negative retouching, specifically the excessive amount used by this studio, played a critical role in this regard, as we will see in chapter 1.

In the work by the Rodríguez studio, the portraits of women are one example in which the aesthetic project was twofold: the concept of beauty served as a formal device but also embodied the function of the photographs. Among these images are portraits sent to the national beauty contests and photographs for magazines like *Sábado*, a weekly literary magazine that included coupons with pictures to vote for the beauty queen of the Fiesta de las Flores.⁹² Other images appeared in government-sponsored publications dedicated to the international promotion of the country, such as *El libro azul de Colombia*, which, not surprisingly, devoted an entire section of the book to "Beautiful Colombian Women."⁹³ This type of portrait not only played with dramatic lighting effects and soft-focus techniques but also presented an image of the woman as a submissive, passive, moral, and extremely feminine character, sometimes reinforced by using flowers as props to signal purity, innocence, and humility. Another important aspect to note is that the vast majority of the women included in these publications were white members of the elite, who had to follow the intricate codes of etiquette and behavior dictated by the manuals of the time.⁹⁴ Perhaps without deliberate intention, promoting beauty became a way of reinforcing gender roles and underscoring a racial discourse hidden by the aesthetic project that ultimately perpetuated the power dynamics of the white male elite.⁹⁵ However, it is important to acknowledge that the Rodríguezes' studio also photographed the black population of Medellín in dignifying ways, particularly at the end of Melitón's career. Some of his photographs present blackness in honoring and powerful ways (figs. 1.10 and 1.13).

As seen in the two self-portraits previously analyzed, both the Rodríguez brothers and de la Calle had an increased concern with personal identity and exploited photography to mythologize their personality and business interests. Although the primary interest of both studios was commercial, they distinctly promoted different veiled agendas. On the one hand, the Rodríguez brothers were immersed in an artistic and intellectual project that produced some of the most compelling photographs of the period in Colombia. Specifically created with either artistic or commercial purposes, these images reflected an aesthetic interest that was ultimately permeated by a strong regionalist ideology that aimed to present Antioquians as more progressive and civilized than the rest of the country, or even Latin America, as I will further explain in this book.⁹⁶ Ideology emerged through these apparently innocent photographs: the elite class of Medellín wanted to look white, sophisticated, and European to parallel themselves with the Western modernist project and thus create distance from an uncivilized and underdeveloped environment.

Conversely, a sociopolitical project underscored de la Calle's work as a photographer. Employing photography as a tool of resistance against the embedded ideologies of race and progress, he gave voice to and documented a part of the Antioquian society that was otherwise overlooked. De la Calle broadened the idea of Antioquian identity by opening up the spectrum of documentation subjects. We see this, for example, in his photographs of peasants—where he covered their bare feet—or in those of cross-dressers, in which he profoundly questioned the ideas of gender identity. The Rodríguez brothers would not portray these types of sitters in their studio. These other identities are a part of our visual history only because de la Calle was willing to portray them. This is further discussed when analyzing these images in chapter 3.

Ultimately, what these images reflect—just as de la Calle's self-portrait does—is a plea for acceptance, a struggle to be acknowledged as equal and to be seen on their own terms. De la Calle's photographs work against the stereotype, bearing witness to a broader scope of Medellín's society and humanizing people who have not historically been treated as worthy of documentation. His photographs work as active witnesses, not in the legal sense of simple testimonies, but in a human sense. They activate a desire for knowledge and act as a form of witnessing, as humanizing devices, questioning and broadening the understanding of what photography can accomplish far beyond the medium's limits as a representation.⁹⁷

Picturing Photography

In 1937, *El Bateo* published a caricature with the caption “Escena muda, pero . . . muy paísa” (Silent scene, but . . . very *paísa*) (fig. I.11).⁹⁸ It depicted a two-vignette scene of a portraiture shot. In the top vignette, a photographer—dressed in a Roman costume—instructs a man to sit calmly in front of the camera while he adjusts it to take the picture. The sitter sits silently and straight, waiting for him to take the photo. He wears what seems to be the typical garment of an antioqueño peasant with a striped scarf around his neck and a set of espadrilles covering his feet. In the lower vignette, the photographer hides beneath the cloth that covers the camera to take the photo while the sitter stands up to attack the photographer with a knife. The caricature directly addressed the presumed shrewdness of the antioqueños, an attitude promoted by the myth of the *raza antioqueña*. Allegorically, the caricature also commented on the opposition between refinement and culture and the uncivilized pueblo; it spoke about the power of photography as a tool of authority and control.

From another perspective, *El Bateo*’s caricature ironically presented the act of being photographed and its specific meanings at the time. Photography was an activity that was becoming accessible to a larger demographic population, and the caricature satirized, contested, and addressed the ritual of going to the photographer’s studio to be captured in a static and never-changing picture. Despite important technological advances, the experience of posing for the camera changed very little over time. The caricature, published by the end of the period studied in this book, conveyed impressions similar to those described by Enrique Echavarría in a chronicle about the experience of visiting the photographer’s studio at the time of collodion photography, that is, right before the Rodríguez brothers and de la Calle opened their studios in the 1890s. It is worth quoting the chronicle at length. Echavarría wrote:

Humanity has three small martyrdoms in everyday life, and our benefactors caused them: the tailor, the barber, and the dentist. Formerly there were four because the photographer was included.

When someone resolved to portray himself, back in the old days, he would be subject to the following: making an appointment and specifying if he wanted a group, a vignette, or a whole body shot; a complex operation. When the day arrived, it was necessary to adorn

Escena muda, pero.....muy paísa



I.11. “Escena muda, pero . . . muy paísa,” 1937. Page from *El Bateo*. EAFIT, Centro Cultural Biblioteca LEV, Sala de Patrimonio Documental, Medellín.

oneself and dress in Sunday clothes, especially if the sitter belonged to the fairer sex. Already in the gallery, and when the photographer was ready, it all began by positioning the patient; he was placed in a pose; usually lying on a table, where there were several scattered books, one or two open, as if he were a great thinker, then . . . even though he could not read. In such a position, a set of iron hooks, prepared in advance, were fastened behind him; these caught mainly the head and part of the body. They did all this to keep the sitter completely still.

One could not blink during the one minute that the shot lasted. In this situation, the photographer assumed a solemn attitude, as befitted such a delicate action; with one hand, he held the shutter and with the other the clock to measure time. He resembled a physician who took blood pressure from a patient. And counted very slowly . . . one, two, and three.

However, this was not enough; one had to wait a long time while the operator developed the plate to see if the print was good; most of the time, it was imperfect and bad, and it was necessary to repeat the portrait until success was complete.⁹⁹

There seems to be little difference between the experience presented in the caricature and the one verbally described by the chronicler, even though the technological aspects of the medium had improved immensely: shooting times were faster, and thus the iron structure was no longer needed. New materials—such as gelatin dry plates—had been introduced to facilitate the photographer's task. There were a greater variety of cameras, and prices were more accessible. Yet the ritual itself had changed very little.

By the time the caricature from *El Bateo* appeared, parodies related to posing for a photograph were already a tradition. One of the best known was Honoré Daumier's *Croquis Parisiens* from 1853, a drawing that juxtaposed two photographic shots: one where the photographer took a frontal portrait of a man and one where the pose of the sitter is more artificial (fig. I.12). The captions read, "Pose de l'homme de la nature" (Natural human pose) and "Pose de l'homme civilise" (Civilized man pose), respectively. Here, Daumier satirized how the frontal shot had become a sign of "'naturalness,' of a culturally unsophisticated class," while the high class assumed more intricate and "cultivated" poses.¹⁰⁰ In the 1880s, under the influence of control and rehabilitation measures, the frontal photograph transitioned into a means of identifying and classifying individuals, particularly those seen as socially inferior such as criminals and Indigenous peoples.¹⁰¹ In these photos, the subject faces the camera directly, and there is a confrontational aspect with both the photographer and the spectator. In contrast, in the more elaborate poses, the sitter rarely looks at the camera and instead presents herself as a subject for contemplation.



I.12. Honoré Daumier, *Croquis Parisiens*, 1853. Lithograph with watercolor, 22.86 × 33.02 cm (9 × 13 in.). Minneapolis Institute of Art, gift of Janet H. Spokes in memory of her parents, Angelica and Ignatius Houley, 2013.26.10. Photo: Minneapolis Institute of Art.

This phenomenon was not restricted to the Parisian environment. Indeed, it was an occurrence that extended across borders and was noticeable in Medellín during the nineteenth century. De la Calle and the Rodríguez brothers took pictures that aligned with the two poses identified by Daumier. Some photos speak to the frontal and natural poses, while others present more sophisticated and elaborate attitudes of the portrayed persons. Indeed, many of the sitters seen as negative subjects of Antioquian society appear to claim recognition, equality, and a sense of citizenship through photography. Some of de la Calle's sitters confront the camera so directly that they challenge the tendency to be stereotyped, giving the subjects agency through an act of self-representation.

Although in different ways, the Rodríguez studio and de la Calle, along with other photographers from the period, such as Rafael Mesa, were literally mapping the Antioquian society of the time.¹⁰² Sitters and photographers alike were aware of the democratization of image culture that was transforming the way Medellín's citizens understood and

disseminated their identity. Pedro Fernández distinctly addressed this in an article from 1889 where he noted:

Any anonymous individual in this world is for their family a character to immortalize. Earlier, it was forbidden for most mortals to bequeath to their descendants the image of their ancestors. Photography has brought the entire world under identical conditions, painting with equal fidelity and economy an emperor with his shields and crests and an *arriero* with his wide-brimmed hat and *tunjana* shirt. The light of the sky is a great democrat: it paints with its camera obscura whatever stands in front of it. Today, the penniless boyfriend and the unhappiest father can, without going to Jamaica, give portraits to their girlfriends or own those of their children. And the light that leads home so many treasures of veneration and tenderness leads us from town to town and from nation to nation to the ends of the planet.¹⁰³

By the end of the nineteenth century in Medellín, photography had become ubiquitous and changed how people related to and understood the world surrounding them. Although the city was geographically secluded, a medium that facilitated the recognition of their identity and allowed the appreciation of and engagement with other places far away and presumably unapproachable counterbalanced the presumed isolation. In particular, the elite class of the city was exceptionally well connected. Although it took enormous amounts of time and money to reach other places, such as Europe and the United States, they traveled back and forth, bringing ideas and objects that changed the way they perceived the world.¹⁰⁴ Antioquia also experienced a publishing boom between 1850 and 1920, much more than in other parts of the country, allowing its people to be informed and entertained. The city's archives house newspapers from Paris, cartes de visite by Nadar and Disdéri, and postcards from different European countries, as well as news about the latest advancements in technology and history—like the invention of the x-ray, the sinking of the *Titanic*, or the beginning of World War I.

Geographically, however, Medellín was secluded. In a map published in 1926 on the cover of a magazine called *Progreso*, the city was presented as both the center of the world and an isolated town. The map shows the time it took to travel by hydroplane from Medellín to other

places in Colombia. Remarkably, a trip to the capital, Bogotá, took fifty hours—flying, with intermittent stops. Reaching one of the port cities on the Caribbean shore, such as Barranquilla, Colombia's principal point of departure, required the same time. This map merged and pictured the vanity of the antioqueños, a regionalist culture partly driven by the immense difficulty of communication in the preindustrial age and the “natural ties” with which the intellectual elite intensely tried to identify.¹⁰⁵

Considering this, Medellín's development and rapid evolution from a small town into Colombia's second-largest city was a remarkable feat. The role played by the photographic negative was crucial for consolidating the ideological discourses that allowed for such a change. As photography became a more objective and portable medium, it also became a place to visualize and materialize ideology to share, support, or contest it, regardless of geographical isolation or historical distance.

The Chapters

This book is structured into five chapters. In chapter 1, “Envisioning a New Race: Photographic Manipulation and the Discourse of *la raza antioqueña*,” I analyze a group of negative plates and the retouching performed on them to understand how the discourse of Antioquian race manifested visually or was challenged through photography. Although the visual alterations of the images remained invisible for most sitters, they transformed the photos in ways that had real and lived consequences. I argue that the implications of the Antioquian race and its counterdiscourse materialized on the negative plates literalizing each perspective's rhetoric. To achieve this, I explain in detail the invention and development of the Antioquian race discourse, which emerged in the second half of the nineteenth century in Medellín and which Libardo López epitomized in 1910 with the publication of the book *La raza antioqueña*. In this chapter, I trace the work of some authors who proclaimed the superiority of the Antioquian race to underscore the recurring dimension of this discourse. I look at some sources these authors drew from to understand what inspired their ideas and how eugenics was appropriated and adapted to fit the Colombian context. Then, through a careful analysis of negative glass plates, I introduce a comparative analysis of the different retouching techniques used by both Fotografía Rodríguez and de

la Calle in their photographic practices. The context in which Fotografía Rodríguez worked and the elite status of their clients led them to produce highly manipulated images that aligned with the discourse of the *raza antioqueña*. Conversely, de la Calle's use of retouching aimed to elevate the social status of his clients and fulfill aspirational desires, thus challenging the discourses imposed by the elite. However, this straightforward narrative becomes complicated when analyzing the photographs of black sitters and how both Fotografía Rodríguez and de la Calle manipulated the negatives.

Chapter 2 focuses on the work of Fotografía Rodríguez. Here, I argue that the negative was central to the Rodríguezes' artistic practice and to reproducing the racial morality their photos promoted, a morality clearly based on the discourse of the Antioquian race. Through carefully analyzing some of their pictorial photographs, I examine how the Rodríguez brothers used pictorialism and the negative to reinforce the racial discourse of *la raza antioqueña*. Furthermore, in this chapter, I explore the multiple ways in which the Antioquian race reinforced whiteness as superior. Exploring a selection of their photographs—in both their negative and positive forms—I unravel the intricate layers through which this ideology conveyed notions of superiority that surpassed the understanding of race simply as skin color, complicating the conventional definitions of whiteness.

Within this context, my examination takes on a multifaceted approach to the concept of the negative. Not only do I study the physical objects themselves and the interventions performed on the negative plates to produce pictorial effects, but I also craft a theoretical approach to the negative from a symbolic perspective. Here, I introduce the notion of the negative Other: photographic images that purposefully accentuate distinctions and disparities rooted in race, gender, ethnicity, geography, or social class. This is seen particularly in pictures that tended to aestheticize subaltern subjects, whether through *costumbrista* scenes or depictions of women in theatrical scenarios.

Last, I explore the profound significance of negatives as the matrix for reproducing photographs—and thus the ideologies inscribed in them—hence facilitating their widespread circulation. These three ways of understanding the negative—materially, symbolically, and as reproduction's matrix—intertwine and collaborate, forming a comprehensive understanding of the manifold implications of this concept. Through this

exploration, my aim in this chapter is to illuminate the intricate interplay between pictorialism, *costumbrismo*, the negative, and *la raza antioqueña*. By peering into the world of the Rodríguez brothers' photography, we can gain invaluable insights into the complexities of race, representation, and the formation of identities in the social tapestry of Medellín at the turn of the twentieth century.

Chapter 3 addresses the work of Benjamín de la Calle. In particular, I study a group of photographs in which he challenges the binary understanding of gender. Here, I examine the practice of cross-dressing in diverse contexts that range from allegorical representations to repressive practices by the police. I argue that, while de la Calle's work usually contests the elites' rhetoric, destabilizing the discourse surrounding the Antioquian race, in other instances, his photographs aligned with it. *La raza antioqueña* shaped the understanding of whiteness and enforced a rigid set of conservative norms and behaviors, including a strict gender dynamic. Through a meticulous analysis of de la Calle's photographs capturing the urban Other, I unveil inquiries about representation, visibility, and power dynamics. This chapter showcases how de la Calle's work demystifies and deconstructs the discourse surrounding the Antioquian race, shedding light on its complexities and unveiling alternative narratives. It also puts to the fore the ambivalences of his photographic practice, as he also worked for governmental institutions and their disciplinary apparatuses.

If, in chapter 2, race was understood beyond inherited physical traits, in this one, the negative is understood beyond its literal physical object. Here, I look at the negative from a symbolic perspective: the negative emerges as a metaphorical conduit to address subaltern subjectivities, often perceived as deviant, and thus negative subjects, within the late nineteenth-century Latin American context. These nonconforming subjectivities disrupt binary categorizations, such as negative/positive, compelling us to question the conventional understanding of the negative as a distinct and singular category. The pictures analyzed in this chapter present, in a positive light, subjects that have traditionally appeared as undesirable. Therefore, I argue that these images symbolically resist photography's binarism, so strongly embedded in the negative/positive process.

Chapter 4 delves into the analysis of Orientalist photography produced in Medellín, questioning the understanding of the concept as viewed uniquely from a Western perspective. These images broaden the conception of Orientalism, complicating its definition and the relation

between Western and non-Western cultures. Analyzing a series of Orientalizing photographs produced by both Fotografía Rodríguez and de la Calle, I reassess the meaning of Orientalism, shifting the perspective usually given to this term and questioning the implications of Orientalist tropes outside the colonial and the colonist territories.

In this chapter, I build upon previous discussions of the negative—from material and metaphorical perspectives—and delve into the notion of alterity and the subaltern in photographic representations. I also emphasize the itinerant nature of photographs and their ability to circulate across geographical spaces, historical periods, and various mediums. The photographic negative played a crucial role in enabling massive-scale circulation, leading to questions of reproduction, originality, and the wide dissemination of images. In summary, I explore the appropriation and circulation of Orientalism, delving into its implications within the context of Medellín and its complex relationship with race and representation. I examine the role of the photographic negative in facilitating the dissemination of images, ultimately shedding light on the dynamic interplay between Orientalism, visual production, and notions of alterity and identity.

The book ends with a chapter that studies the backdrops employed by Fotografía Rodríguez and Benjamín de la Calle. Whereas in the previous sections the analysis of the photographs focused on the sitters, chapter 5 focuses on the other elements that compose studio portraiture. Here the negative is understood from a spatial perspective. Thus, I displace my analysis from the pictured sitters to the negative space of the images. In studio photography, the negative space of the pictures often displays painted backdrops. I argue that these background paintings, frequently disregarded in photographic analyses, contribute to the meaning of the pictures and prompt questions regarding the notion of the Antioquian race. Just as retouching served as a photographic supplement for both photographers, the negative space in the photographs also played a role in amplifying their meaning, sometimes in seemingly contradictory ways.

This project proposes a critical and detailed reading of the work of Fotografía Rodríguez and Benjamín de la Calle through the notion of the negative. It also serves as a model to analyze the materialization and reproduction of ideologies in studio photography, a poorly studied genre when it comes to national discourses and racial theories. The issues at stake here are by no means exclusive to the work of the Rodríguez

brothers and de la Calle. This book is only a model to understand the copious instances in which racial discourses are materialized or challenged through photography. The intersections of race and photography are a worldwide phenomenon usually studied by other fields, such as sociology or anthropology, reflecting the hierarchies of the photographic medium and those of the disciplines through which these images are looked upon.

Before delving into the detailed study of the photographs, I want to clarify one last thing. Most of the positive versions of the photographs depicted in this book are the result of a scanning process done at the Biblioteca Pública Piloto in Medellín to make their collection available to a larger public. Conversely, the negative versions of the images are not public or digitally available. The photographs of the negatives included here were made exclusively for this publication.

The positive black-and-white digital versions of the photos in this book differ from the various forms these pictures could have taken in their positive versions during their production period. For instance, a few examples of positive copies were hand-colored. We can also sense how the pictures might have been cropped, eliminating the handwritten aspects visible on the negatives and other unwanted materials such as lighting devices. However, the archive does not hold a large volume of positive prints, making it hard to pinpoint exactly what the manipulations on these versions of the images could have been.

DUKE

UNIVERSITY
PRESS

Notes

INTRODUCTION

- 1 Colombia has a centralized government, but the country is divided into thirty-two regions called departments. These subdivisions have a certain degree of autonomy and are ruled by a governor, who is elected through popular vote.
- 2 “Que hay un lugar en la América Latina en que existe esa roca ideal de una raza superior, y ese lugar es Antioquia.” López, *La raza antioqueña*, 7–8. All the translations are mine unless otherwise noted. It is important to note here that in Colombia this type of regionalist discourse developed parallel to a national identity. See Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters*.
- 3 The Thousand Days’ War was one of the many civil wars between Conservatives and Liberals during the nineteenth century in Colombia. It lasted from 1899 to 1902 and was the first war to be photographically recorded in the country. Indeed, both Melitón Rodríguez and Benjamín de la Calle photographed some of the generals and civilians involved in this war. Some of these pictures are discussed in chapter 3.
- 4 Melo, “¿Raza antioqueña?”
- 5 Azoulay, *Civil Imagination*, 18–27.
- 6 Quoted in Batchen, *Negative/Positive*, 104n1.
- 7 Lavédrine, “The Negative Image,” 141.
- 8 Grimaldo Grisby, “Negative-Positive Truths,” 16–38.
- 9 Lavédrine, “The Negative Image,” 144.
- 10 Valverde, *Photographic Negatives*, 14.
- 11 Valverde, *Photographic Negatives*, 15.
- 12 Lavédrine, “The Negative Image,” 146.
- 13 Batchen, *Negative/Positive*, 4.
- 14 Cook, *Victorian Negatives*, xviii.
- 15 Holmes, “Doings of the Sunbeam,” 5.

- 16 “Los trabajos mejor en todo sentido. Mejores negativos y más trabajo.”
Rodríguez, “Cuaderno de caja,” 89.
- 17 “Se terminó con dos negativos de niños que estarán muy buenos, los que
voy a desarrollar en el acto.” Rodríguez, “Cuaderno de caja,” 89.
- 18 Grimaldo Grisby, “Negative-Positive Truths,” 22.
- 19 Grimaldo Grisby, “Negative-Positive Truths,” 22.
- 20 Quoted in Batchen, *Negative/Positive*, 7.
- 21 Morley and Wills, “Photography,” quoted in Cook, *Victorian Negatives*, xxix.
- 22 Cook, *Victorian Negatives*, xxix.
- 23 Sheehan, *Study in Black and White*, 12.
- 24 Pinney with the PhotoDemos Collective, *Citizens of Photography*, 5.
- 25 Benjamin, “Little History of Photography,” 276.
- 26 See Penhall, “The Invention and Reinvention,” 106–12.
- 27 Riegl, “The Modern Cult of Monuments,” 78.
- 28 See Alpers et al., “Visual Culture Questionnaire,” 25–70.
- 29 See Batchen, “Does Size Matter?,” 164–74.
- 30 Edwards and Hart, “Introduction: Photographs as Objects,” 1.
- 31 See Riegl, *Late Roman Art Industry*, 22–24; Yonan, “Toward a Fusion.”
- 32 See Fineman, *Faking It*; Kriebel and Zervigón, *Photography and Doubt*.
- 33 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 6.
- 34 Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 59.
- 35 Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, 112.
- 36 Christopher Pinney discusses this idea of minimizing contingency through
overpainting or Photoshopping images in their positive versions. See Pinney
with the PhotoDemos Collective, *Citizens of Photography*, 6.
- 37 Photographers have always been aware that photography does not cap-
ture everything. The most famous example is Daguerre’s Boulevard du
Temple daguerreotype from 1838. Due to the long exposure time of the
process, in this photograph only a person getting his shoes shined was
captured. The people in motion on a busy Parisian boulevard were miss-
ing from the picture. For a more contemporary reflection of this particu-
larity of the negative, see Koester, “Nanking Restaurant.”
- 38 Batchen, *Negative/Positive*, 7.
- 39 Cerón-Anaya et al., “A Conceptual Roadmap,” 177.
- 40 López Rodríguez, *Blancura y otras ficciones*, 16–17.
- 41 Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 4–7.
- 42 Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 5.
- 43 For more information on this, see Katzew, *Casta Painting*.
- 44 Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 4.
- 45 Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 7.
- 46 Codazzi’s project exceeds Alexander von Humboldt and Aimé Bonpland’s
initial expedition to South America and José Celestino Mutis’s Botanic

Expedition in its achievements and scientific results. For more information on this, see Uribe Hanabergh, "Translating Landscape"; González Aranda and Uribe Hanabergh, *Manual de arte del siglo XIX*; and Appelbaum, *Dibujar la nación*.

47 López Rodríguez, *Blancura y otras ficciones*, 23–30.

48 Rappaport, *The Disappearing Mestizo*, 7.

49 There is a lot of literature regarding this topic; see Hering Torres, "La limpieza de sangre," 32–55.

50 For more information about the historical understanding of the concept of race, see Banton, *Racial Theories*; and Wade, "The Meaning of Race and Ethnicity," 4–23.

51 Wade, "The Meaning of Race and Ethnicity," 13.

52 Wade, "The Meaning of Race and Ethnicity," 14.

53 Wade, "The Meaning of Race and Ethnicity."

54 This is true except for the "indigenous race." Indigenous people were commonly placed outside the map entirely and thus outside of the regions that compose the nation. For more on this, see Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters*. Scholars such as Peter Wade and Michael Banton adapted the concept of racialization to refer to the process of creating and naturalizing human differences in groups characterized by certain biological or cultural traits. This concept's scope is to avoid the reification of a single meaning of *race* and to study how it has been understood throughout history.

55 Appelbaum, *Muddied Waters*, 15.

56 Sociedad Geográfica de Colombia, "Antioquia."

57 Londoño-Vega, *Religion, Society, and Culture*, 16.

58 See Appelbaum et al., *Race and Nation*.

59 "Estimado amigo y colega: suplicote que si no tienes para ello inconveniente, y lo consideras acto de justicia, te dignes a decirme a continuación tu que bien conoces mis trabajos fotográficos—si en tu concepto poseo suficientes conocimientos en el arte, y si por tanto estoy en capacidad de abrir un establecimiento en cualquier sociedad adelantada, en la seguridad de que satisfaré los gustos más refinados. Motivan esta exigencia los inconvenientes con que a veces pueda tropezar por no ser suficientemente conocido mi nombre como fotógrafo en las poblaciones que visite. Perdona la molestia que te ocasiona tu amigo afectísimo, que te desea felicidades. Benjamín Calle Muñoz." De la Calle and Rodríguez, "Fotografía."

60 "Estimado colega y amigo, con el mayor gusto doy contestación a tu súplica, en los mismos términos con que, espontáneamente, te lo he manifestado varias veces: tus trabajos, en mi humilde concepto, pueden figurar al lado de los mejores del país, en material de buen gusto y exquisito acabado; algunos de ellos me han causado envidia, te lo confieso sinceramente. Otra persona de tus aptitudes y conocimientos en el arte, estaría

á la hora presente, no digo en Medellín, que es poco: en la misma Bogotá o en cualquier otra de las capitales suramericanas. Si esto te sirve de algo, quedará contento tu amigo. H.M. Rodríguez.” De la Calle and Rodríguez, “Fotografía.”

61 De la Calle and Rodríguez, “Fotografía.”

62 Most of the photographs discussed in this book exist only in their negative version. Since both studios were commercial enterprises, the positive versions remain in family albums and private collections. During this time, photographers only kept the negatives of their work, which in some cases were inherited or passed along to another photographer who might have acquired the studio. The positive images analyzed here are contemporary scans of the negatives or digital inversions from the photograph of a negative.

63 Londoño Vélez, *Testigo ocular*, 104.

64 Londoño Vélez, *Testigo ocular*, 104.

65 Betancur, *Moscas de todos los colores*, 153.

66 As opposed to that of the Rodríguez brothers, which qualified as a first-class atelier. See Londoño Vélez, *Testigo ocular*, 149–50; and Londoño Vélez, *Benjamín de la Calle*, 12.

67 Londoño Vélez, *Testigo ocular*, 150.

68 Domínguez Rendón, *Vestido, ostentación y cuerpos*, 132. The term *urbanidad* in Spanish connotes a sense of belonging to the city and thus of being civilized. Benjamín de la Calle came from a small town where the rules of civility and etiquette did not follow the standards of the capital.

69 Domínguez Rendón, *Vestido, ostentación y cuerpos*, 134.

70 Betancur, *Moscas de todos los colores*, loc. 6535.

71 Betancur, *Moscas de todos los colores*, loc. 6576.

72 Prager, “Four Flowering Plants.”

73 Ruiz Gómez, *Benjamín de la Calle*, 15.

74 See Lemaitre, *Rafael Reyes*.

75 The book was not a photo book as the term is now understood. It was a part of the propaganda program of the president, but it can be argued that it constitutes a photo book due to the importance of the images accompanying the text. It was also the first book that compiled images from the entire country, utilizing photogravure as a printing technique in Colombia. See Serrano, *Historia de la fotografía en Colombia*, 183.

76 “El Presidente titular de Colombia, saluda al Sr. D. Benjamín de Calle, le da cumplidas gracias por los trabajos Fotograficos que ha ejecutado durante su corta permanencia en Medellín, y por medio de la presente lo recomienda como fotografo habil y cumplido caballero.” Reyes, “El Presidente.”

77 Rafael Mesa also took very similar views of the congregation of masses in the plazas of Medellín, but the president did not mention or acknowledge

his work. I attribute these images to de la Calle, but I have not found any further evidence.

78 Ochoa, "La Fotografía," 294.

79 The difference between likeness and resemblance is further discussed in chapter 1. For a thorough discussion of this topic during the nineteenth century, see von Brevern, "Resemblance After Photography."

80 Francisco Antonio Cano became the first independent artist from Antioquia. He organized the first fine arts exhibition in Medellín in 1892 and, together with Horacio Marino Rodríguez and the poet Luis de Greiff, he published the first illustrated magazine in the region, titled *El Repertorio* (1896–97). In 1897 he traveled to Bogotá, where he became part of the capital's artistic circle, and in 1898 he went to Paris on a government fellowship to study painting and sculpture at the Académie Julian and the Académie Colarossi. By 1901, Cano was considered a "symbol of artistic redemption" in Antioquia. See Londoño Vélez, *La mano luminosa*.

81 *El Montañés* (1897–99) was a literary magazine edited by Gabriel Latorre, Francisco Gómez, and Mariano Ospina. It was one of the first magazines that aligned with the progressive discourse driven by the intellectual elite in Medellín. Through its texts and images, it supported modern ideals and promoted the modernizing project of the region. Horacio Marino founded the architecture firm H. M. Rodríguez e Hijos, active from 1903 until 1973. This firm was responsible for changing the provincial look of Medellín and importing a modern architectural style to the city. It was the first firm to design and construct buildings in Medellín.

82 Mejía, *El taller de los Rodríguez*, 7.

83 Tabares, *Melitón Rodríguez en blanco y negro*, 35.

84 These books were in their library as study guides and are held by Melitón's grandson in Medellín. *La pratique en photographie, avec le procédé au gélatino-bromure d'argent* was published by the Librairie illustrée in 1896, and *L'art en photographie* was published by the same company in 1893.

85 See Stanfield, *Of Beasts and Beauty*.

86 Stanfield, *Of Beasts and Beauty*, 2.

87 "El cuerpo y la apariencia física . . . ocupan la imaginación de escritores y artistas, construyendo un círculo argumentativo en el que los blancos son más bellos y, por tanto, moralmente superiores, de manera que quien es bello y moral es considerado como blanco." López Rodríguez, *Blancura y otras ficciones*, 36.

88 *El Bateo*, "No habrá feos."

89 *El Bateo*, "No habrá feos."

90 "Feas que quieren quedar bonitas, tuertos y bizcos con los ojos buenos, blancos que no se acomodan con las sombras y negros a quienes hay que

hacer blancos." P. N. G., "Pequeña historia de la fotografía en Antioquia"; Escobar Villegas, *¡Hágase la luz!*, 77–83.

91 Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 36.

92 In 1957, Arturo Uribe, a member of the tourist bureau of Medellín, organized the first official festival, called Feria de las Flores. It was his idea that the state of Antioquia and the city of Medellín should host a tribute to the thriving flower industry of Colombia. However, there has always been a fascination with the production of flowers in the region, perhaps due to its yearlong spring weather. It seems likely that the beauty contest promoted through *Sábado* for the Fiesta de las Flores was a precedent for the official festival. What is remarkable in both cases is the association of flower production (and the idea of eternal spring) as part of the Antioquian identity and the explicit co-relation between flowers and women. All the festivals include a beauty contest. For more information about *Sábado*, see Arango de Tobón, *Publicaciones periódicas en Antioquia*, 334–36; Posada Callejas, *El libro azul de Colombia*.

93 For example, in his notebook Melitón specifies that the photograph of Elisa Botero was taken for a beauty pageant.

94 Ramirez M. et al., *Moda femenina en Medellín*, 61.

95 See Stanfield, *Of Beasts and Beauty*.

96 For more details, see López, *La raza antioqueña*.

97 For a deeper discussion about the topic of witnessing, see Baer, *Spectral Evidence*.

98 *Paisa* is the demonym used to designate the people from the departments of Antioquia, Caldas, Risaralda, and Quindío.

99 "Tiene la humanidad tres pequeños martirios en la vida cotidiana, los causan nuestros mismos benefactores y son: el sastre, el peluquero y el dentista. Antiguamente eran cuatro, porque se añadía el fotógrafo. Cuando alguno tomaba la resolución de retratarse, allá en los tiempos viejos, debía someterse a lo siguiente: pedir turno y manifestar si quería grupo, viñeta o cuerpo entero; operación de alta cirugía. Llegado que era el día, se necesitaba engalanarse, ponerse la ropita dominguera, y sobre todo, si el agraciado pertenecía al bello sexo. Ya éste en la galería, y cuando el fotógrafo estaba listo, se principiaba por colocar al paciente; se lo situaba en pose; generalmente recostado a una mesa, donde había varios libros esparcidos, uno que otro abierto, como si fuera un gran pensador, después . . . aunque él no supiera leer. En tal posición se le sujetaban por detrás unos ganchos de hierro, que para el caso había preparados; éstos le cogían la cabeza, principalmente, y parte del cuerpo. Todo ello para guardar completa quietud. No podía pestañearse durante un minuto que duraba la retratada. En esta situación el fotógrafo tomaba una actitud muy seria, como correspondía a tan delicada acción; con una mano agarraba el obturador y con, la

otra el reloj para medir el tiempo. Semejaba un facultativo que pulsara un enfermo. Y contaba muy pausadamente . . . uno, dos y tres. Mas ésto sólo no era suficiente; había que esperar un buen rato, mientras el operador revelaba la placa, para ver si la impresión resultaba buena; la mayor de las veces quedaba imperfecta y mala, y era preciso repetir el retrato hasta obtener un éxito completo.” Echavarría, “La fotografía.”

100 Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 36.

101 Tagg, *The Burden of Representation*, 37.

102 Rafael Mesa (b. 1875) was another studio photographer active in Medellín. His most significant contribution to the history of photography in Antioquia was perhaps the introduction of the photogravure technique in conjunction with Horacio Marino Rodríguez. Together they published the first photogravures in the magazine *El Repertorio*. See Londoño Vélez, *Testigo ocular*, 172–87.

103 “Cualquier individuo anónimo para el mundo, es para su familia un personaje que quiere immortalizar. Antes estaba vedado al mayor número de los mortales legar a sus descendientes la imagen de sus antepasados. . . . La fotografía ha puesto al mundo todo en condiciones idénticas, pintando con igual fidelidad y baratera a un emperador con sus escudos y blasones que un arriero con su sombrero de anchas alas y su camiseta tunjana. La luz del cielo es una gran demócrata: pinta desde su cámara oscura cuanto se le pone delante, no importa sea harapo. Hoy el novio más destituido y el padre más infeliz, pueden, sin ir hasta Jamaica regalar retratos a sus novias y tener los de sus hijos. Y la luz que así lleva al santuario del hogar tantos tesoros de veneración y de ternura, nos conduce de pueblo en pueblo y de nación en nación hasta los confines del planeta.” Fernández, “Bellas Artes.”

104 For more information about this topic, see Escobar and León Maya, “Siglos de conexiones, no de aislamientos.”

105 For a more in-depth discussion about nationalism/regionalism and its consolidation through natural ties, such as skin color, gender, and parentage, see Anderson, *Imagined Communities*.

ONE. ENVISIONING A NEW RACE

1 Reyes, *Aspectos de la vida social*, 56.

2 For a thorough discussion of this topic, see Brew, *El desarrollo económico de Antioquia*; and Melo, *Historia de Antioquia*.

3 Throughout its history, the relationship between Panama and Colombia has been a conflicting one. In 1713, during colonial times in the Americas, the Viceroyalty of New Granada was founded. It included the territories of today's Colombia, Ecuador, Venezuela, and Panama. Although Panama and Colombia are neighboring territories, the long mountain range of the