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Essay

My research project for a seminar on Latin American modernism with Professor Fabiola Lopez-Duran began with a series of photographs taken in 1865 by zoologist Louis Agassiz. While on an expedition to Brazil to study species development, Agassiz commissioned photographs of different races of people as specimens for his laboratory at Harvard University. The extreme objectification of the photographs' subjects is deeply disturbing. Indeed, a sense of the profound injustice and inhumanity of these images compelled me to learn more about how and why they were made.

Looking closely at Agassiz's photographs, I intuited that their posing and framing bear an uncanny resemblance to early studies of artistic style and form by the first art historian in the United States, Charles Eliot Norton. I had previously researched Norton with my advisor Professor Leo Costello in a seminar on Romanticism, in which I studied Norton's friendship with John Ruskin. When I realized that Agassiz was Norton's teacher, I knew I would have to be brave to tackle this project. Not only would this project require me to confront scientific racism, but I would also have to come to terms with its legacy in my own field of art history. In order to map the interrelation of scientific and artistic methodologies, I would need to draw on a broad range of resources from the history of science, art, and race in the Americas.

Only a research library with a wide scope and excellent collections in art, history, and the natural sciences could facilitate the interdisciplinary framework necessary for my project. In fact, the library's resources were a collaborative partner, an interlocutor that opened new possibilities and previously unexamined connections between bodies of knowledge. Research guides for art history, the history of science, American history, Brazilian studies, and Latin American history provided a broad overview of scientific expeditions in the Americas and the historiography of art history, from which I narrowed in on key databases, websites, microfilms, and books. Most of my research was gathered through *JStor*, *Art Full Text*, and *WorldCat*, which I followed up with keyword searches in *OneSearch* in order to leave no stone unturned. The *Darwin Correspondence Project* and the digitization of many books in Harvard's libraries proved invaluable, allowing me to search and cross-reference massive amounts of information. Zotero helped me keep track of a wide variety of resources, and Scrivener kept all my footnotes in order.

I built a timeline of Agassiz and Norton in their scholarly community. To fill in the specifics, I consulted Fondren's microfilm collections titled *Landmarks of Science*, *History of Women*, as well as *Nineteenth Century: Visual Arts and Architecture*. Several early printings of Agassiz and Norton's books were also available through the Library Service Center, and these hard copies were crucial as they allowed for high quality scans of their illustrations. As a result, I discovered a legacy of scientific racism in Charles Eliot Norton's lectures, one that influenced his history of ancient art and formalist approach to artwork.

My key primary sources for my research were Louis Agassiz's photographs and accounts

of his expeditions, Charles Eliot Norton's lectures and essays, and key texts of scientific racism studied by Agassiz and Norton. Fondren has a number of books on scientific racism that were co-authored or reviewed by Agassiz or Norton. Three of these were important touch-points for my study— *Crania Aegyptiaca, Or, Observations on Egyptian Ethnography Derived from Anatomy, History and the Monuments* by Samuel George Morton; *The Laws of Race, as Connected with Slavery* by Sidney George Fischer; and *Types of Mankind Or, Ethnological Researches: Based upon the Ancient Monuments, Paintings, Sculptures, and Crania of Races, and upon Their Natural, Geographical, Philological and Biblical History* by Josiah Clark Nott. I am grateful that the library has cared for these books, as hateful as their content is, because they provide a crucial window into an intellectual justification for slavery and racism. Scientific racism was widely disseminated in mid-nineteenth century America, and yet its widespread influence has rarely been acknowledged in the historiography of art history.

I turned therefore to twentieth century French theories of visuality and modernity to understand ways that the racialized, gendered, colonized, and medicalized body is constituted by science and ideology. Georges Canguilhem, Georges Didi-Huberman, and Frantz Fanon's theories provided crucial conceptual frameworks. They inspired me to question the epistemology that Agassiz's photographs manifested and the aesthetics that rendered them legible. I was likewise prompted to critically examine the way of looking that Norton proposed. In addition, my project has been shaped by the rich resources on Brazil in Fondren Library. Rare books, maps, and a broad range of primary and secondary materials on Brazil were fundamental to my understanding of that geographic region. Thanks to Fondren's generous investments, I was able to synthesize information from a variety of sources to tell the story of American art history's early engagement with the natural sciences and concepts of culture, race, and aesthetics that resulted from the disciplines' alliance.

I wanted to write an essay on intellectual history because I believe this type of history captures a sense of wholeness. It is both micro- and macro-history as it situates individuals within a larger context of prevalent historical concepts and transnational sociocultural developments. An intellectual history of the formation of natural science and art history as disciplines at Harvard University simply would not have been possible without Fondren Library's liberal arts mission and its broad range of resources.