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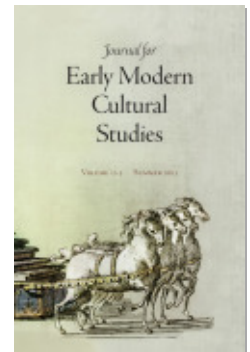
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## **Mistaken Identities?: Alessandro de' Medici and the Question of "Race"**

Mary Gallucci

Journal for Early Modern Cultural Studies, Volume 15, Number 3, Summer 2015, pp. 40-81 (Article)

Published by University of Pennsylvania Press



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# Mistaken Identities?:

## Alessandro de' Medici and the Question of "Race"

MARY GALLUCCI

### ABSTRACT

*Alessandro de' Medici's life and its representation reveal important beliefs about family, politics, and genealogy during the Italian Renaissance. Duke Alessandro's government marked the end of the Florentine Republic and the beginning of hereditary rule. Many scholars interpret Alessandro's assassination as a fitting end to the tyrannical usurpation of Florentine liberty. This moral and political interpretation, championed by supporters of Italian unification and cherished by writers from the Romantic period until this day, has dominated assessments of Alessandro's life and rule. The fact that he was illegitimate has given rise to many accounts of his origins and to the related controversies over the possibility that his mother was a peasant or a slave. The slave controversy admits a further question: was his mother's background North African? Or Southern (i.e., sub-Saharan) African? Such arguments assume that slaves are black and that blacks are a clearly defined group. The history of Alessandro de' Medici is inseparable from claims made for liberal society against tyranny, from evolving concepts of race, and from ideas of European cultural superiority over Africa. This essay studies images, both written and visual, of Alessandro de' Medici with a focus on race and on the changing significance of traits now associated with ideologies of ethnicity and nationhood.*



It is important to determine how the life of Alessandro de' Medici (1512–37) has been conceived by historians and art historians with regard to the empirical and theoretical biases that underpin the perception of race. Historically, the concept of race measures physical, mental, and spiritual differences among various human groups. Race has been construed in two broad directions: as a natural phenomenon and as a social construct. Thus the taxonomic dimension of racial thinking invariably entails the following questions: how

do we determine the race of an individual, by forensics and genetics or by reading the social formations of cultural history? Can a DNA profile definitively answer the question of race in the past as well as in the present? I will address the extent to which such concerns have shaped the biography of Alessandro de' Medici, first Duke of Florence.<sup>1</sup>

Since 2004, paleopathologists have been examining the bones of members of the Medici family buried in the crypt of San Lorenzo. The scientists have reported on matters such as the diet of Duke Cosimo and his family; the evidence of chronic medical conditions such as diabetes and arthritis evident from the remains; and the unnamed infant bodies indicative of still-births. Other questions they may look to answer include rumors of suspicious deaths, issues of paternity, and finally, the race of Alessandro de' Medici: was he of African, particularly black African, descent?<sup>2</sup> It would seem that, on the basis of this "naturalistic" approach to Alessandro's racial identity, scientists are seeking the quantum of blackness that remains permanently in the body after death.

In a development parallel to the scientific investigation that assumes the natural existence of race, art historians and academics have focused on the ostensible traces of African identity in portraits of Alessandro de' Medici and his children. This approach assumes that racial blackness has visual immediacy as skin color, and that it is also empirically present as certain physical features, such as nose shape or hair texture. The "racing" of Alessandro on the basis of portraits and the like is part of a wider inquiry into the importance of race in the field of art history. For example, the updating of the multi-volume survey *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, edited by David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr., bespeaks an enduring yet evolving interest in race. Reviews of the 2012–2013 exhibition, *Revealing the African Presence in Renaissance Europe*, with titles such as "Hue Were They?," a "Mold-Breaking Renaissance Show," and "From Kongo to Othello,"<sup>3</sup> demonstrate that the juxtaposition of European and African, black and white, in the Renaissance is both justifiable and paradigm-shifting. The reviews register the anomalous presence of Alessandro de' Medici, whose possibly mixed race heritage troubles these inquiries precisely because his Medici name is synonymous with the Italian Renaissance.

It is not my intent here to address Alessandro de' Medici's alleged African background in a positivistic manner; rather, I want to ask, what exactly is at stake in locating Alessandro within a clearly defined taxonomy of race? Why is it an issue if Alessandro, or any member of the Medici family, is of partial Af-

rican descent? As an Italian, Mediterranean dynasty, it is quite probable that the Medici had links to Africa. Cultural studies provides a methodology by which to examine the different ways Alessandro's life has been appropriated by medico-scientific study, art historical critique, and historical and archival investigations. This allows me to analyze how the complex figure of Alessandro has come to embody shifting theories regarding race and cultural contact. In Section 1 of this article, "Origins," I present the biographical traces and how they fit into later historical narratives, especially Romantic visions of European cultural supremacy, colonialism, and the struggle for Italian independence. In Section 2, "Physical and Somatic Traits," I examine the development of racial ideas as they came to be expressed in biological theory, together with the discourse of religious and ethnic identity in the Renaissance and the later emphasis on "blood," with its stress on fixity rather than hybridity. Section 3, "Alessandro and the Visual Record: Who is he?," puns on the title of Valentin Groebner's book *Who Are You?* in order to historicize the complex processes of visualization, description, and identity. The final section, "Alessandro's Legacy," seeks to re-open the question of Alessandro's reign as first duke at the time of Florence's transition from republic to duchy.

### Origins

The history of Alessandro de' Medici, first Duke of Florence (1512–37), has furnished material for numerous legends, myths, and drama.<sup>4</sup> His life was curtailed by assassination, ending his ducal reign after barely six years. Yet, due to his membership in one of the most famous families of the Italian Renaissance, he has enjoyed fame and notoriety. A mark of his cultural and social standing is that he was painted by Pontormo, Vasari, and Bronzino; for, as a Medici, he was well placed to patronize the greatest artists of the time.

Accounts of Alessandro's life offer an instructive occasion for examining the "use and abuse of history" (Nietzsche). Because of the lack of "convincing evidence to limit the possibilities" (Bullard 5185)—no baptismal record has been found for him—a multitude of tales and rumors has accumulated over the centuries, making it necessary to re-examine sources regarding Alessandro and how they have been interpreted and disseminated.<sup>5</sup> George Steiner has theorized about the pull of "topologies of culture," noting that, in the West, "the problem of origins is one of extreme difficulty if only because the accumulated pressures from the past, embedded in our semantics, in our conventions of logic, bend our questions into circular shapes" (486).<sup>6</sup> Perhaps the most common question asked of Alessandro

today is this: was his mother a black African slave? Posing the question in this manner highlights the problem of historical origins. “Black,” “African,” and “slave” are all words with complex histories. Their meanings, at any given instance, are deeply embedded in the specific travails of particular cultures. With its commitment to a close or even necessary relationship between blackness and slavery, the question of Alessandro’s heritage presupposes the long, tragic history of the Atlantic slave trade and its attendant creation of racial institutions and racial hierarchy. New World chattel slavery, with its racial basis, has affected the way we regard fifteenth- and sixteenth-century institutions of bondage and servitude.<sup>7</sup> Once slavery becomes linked to skin color, race assumes the status of a biological given, and the emphasis on particular phenotypic characteristics is overwhelming. For example, signs of blackness become visible and intelligible to white Europeans as clear markers of the natural inferiority of African persons. Because Alessandro de’ Medici’s story draws on the conjoined histories of race and dominance, it is necessary to examine the changing political landscape of Florence and Italy with regard to emerging European nation states, New World colonization, and the slave economy that was transforming the Mediterranean.

While Alessandro’s Medici name is associated with one of the most prestigious families in Western European history, he is considered an anomaly—relegated to the forbidden shadows of the bad, tyrannical Medici, or hidden among the illegitimate. His biography remains a mystery, allowing for rumor to be cast in his direction. Modern academics often fall into the fallacy of presentism when they make Alessandro a “half black man” in “white” Italy; race is smuggled into Alessandro’s story as its basic logic. In fact, little is known about Alessandro’s mother, and his father’s identity is debated to this day. In the Renaissance, patrilocal marriage meant that women moved from the paternal house to the marital one.<sup>8</sup> The mothers of many famous people of the sixteenth century appear in chronicles or memory books by their first names, although naturally their surnames would have been known to their immediate family, only forgotten years later.<sup>9</sup> Children born of non-marital relations often knew their mothers, and such relationships were not necessarily disparaged or concealed. It seems that obfuscation regarding the mother of Alessandro may have arisen during his lifetime: because he was illegitimate (the son of either Lorenzo di Piero or of Cardinal Giulio), and because his mother was said to be a peasant or a slave.<sup>10</sup>

The very nature of early childhood, combined with the destabilizing effects of exile, make it difficult to gain information on Alessandro’s life.<sup>11</sup> While no baptismal record has been found, recent research on the science of astrological

calculation and the political use of horoscopes reveals that Alessandro's birth-date was February 6, 1512.<sup>12</sup> The Tuscan Carmelite astrologer Giuliano Ristori "predicted the violent death of Alessandro de' Medici" by casting Alessandro's geniture, or natal horoscope. Such a talent for prediction ensured that Ristori's services would be urgently requested by the subsequent duke, Cosimo, and that his work, which depended on the inclusion of such facts as the date and time of Alessandro's birth, was studied and commented on for years afterward.<sup>13</sup>

Alessandro spent a portion of his childhood in Rome, along with Ippolito de' Medici (1511–35), natural son of Giuliano de' Medici, during Leo X's papacy.<sup>14</sup> Pope Leo (Giovanni de' Medici) "entrusted [distinguished humanist Pierio] Valeriano with the education of his young nephews, Ippolito and Alessandro de' Medici" (Gaisser 11). When Leo's cousin Giulio de' Medici was elevated to the papacy as Clement VII in 1523, he "continued to entrust [Valeriano] with the education and guidance of the papal nephews . . . Valeriano spent most of the next few years in Florence with his charges" (Gaisser 16).

During the pontificate of Clement VII, Alessandro and the future queen of France, Catherine de' Medici (1519–89), daughter of the deceased Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, were educated in the palatial setting of the Medici villa of Poggio a Caiano, which had been conceived by their illustrious forebear Lorenzo the Magnificent to foster a specific philosophy based on classical values.<sup>15</sup> In 1522 Alessandro was made Duke of Penne by Charles V (Caesaris). Alessandro's guardians and teachers included, in addition to Pierio Valeriano, Ottaviano de' Medici, the cardinal of Cortona (Silvio Passerini), and Giovanni di Bardo Corsi, biographer of Ficino.<sup>16</sup>

Although fragmentary, the notices concerning Alessandro's childhood and education provide a basis for a consistent Medici strategy with regard to the family's investment in their heirs. In modern historiography, however, Alessandro's life has been shaped by assumptions regarding race and legitimacy, factors which then overshadow all other aspects. In order to justify New World slavery from the seventeenth century onwards, Europeans created and defended hierarchies based on perceived racial difference, ignoring and denigrating the idea of reciprocity between north and south. Alessandro came to represent the dangerous other who threatened the notion of European purity. David Nirenberg has stated that "race demands a history" ("Was There Race" 262), warning, however, that "the subject of race tends to bewitch its historians with the same philo-genetic fantasies and teleological visions that underwrite

racial ideologies themselves" ("Was there race" 264). In approaching Alessandro's history from the angle of a thriving and cosmopolitan Mediterranean world, I hope to avoid bewitchment and point instead to a way of viewing difference that is broader and more humanistic in scope. The point is not simply that race is a social construct; it is to gain some sense of how that construction works in terms of Alessandro's image. The republican, anti-monarchical bias of modern historians leads them to condemn Alessandro as a brutal tyrant, and their racial ideology conceives him as an alien, suggesting that the worst forms of political rule—especially despotism—come from without. The "orientalism" of this form of argument implies that tyranny is somehow un-European and must issue from outside. This prevents a substantial self-examination of political or academic institutions and their modes of knowledge production.

There is clear evidence that Alessandro was not neglected in terms of his education, yet later historical accounts stress a sensational narrative of a base-born, ignorant, and sinister figure. A common factor in Romantic and modern studies of the reign of Alessandro in the aftermath of the "fall of the republic" emphasizes the tyrannical nature of this bastard usurper. A nineteenth-century historian, T. Adolphus Trollope, celebrated the glorious Florentine achievements and early Medici greatness, contrasting them to the later tyranny supposedly exemplified by Alessandro. Trollope noted that

portraits of this wretched youth . . . show the lowness of the type to which his organisation belonged. The small contracted features, the low forehead, and mean expression, are altogether unlike any of the Medici race, in whom, whatever else they might be, there was always manifestation of intellectual power. . . . (Trollope, *The Girlhood of Catherine de' Medici* 211)<sup>17</sup>

Trollope clearly reads Alessandro's character from physiognomic signs, and it is easy to see how this way of seeing might draw on racial discourse. References to Alessandro often include a description or mention a nickname—il Moro. About Alessandro, Colonel G.F. Young wrote that his "woolly hair and negro-like appearance had already caused him to be called 'the Moor'" (322). Young continues, "an historian of his own time calls him a 'creature who would have disgraced even the deadliest epochs of Roman villainy'" (365), neglecting to mention that this is what his assassin, Lorenzino de' Medici, wrote.<sup>18</sup> In 1875, reports Young, when the Italian government allowed scientists to open the tomb where Alessandro was interred in Michelangelo's New Sacristy of San Lorenzo, "the figure of Alessandro had been perfectly recognized, both by its

mulatto type and by the marks of the wounds, especially those in the face" (Young 375)—thus, 338 years after the event, the decomposed, severely wounded corpse of Alessandro still bore the phenotypic marks of "its mulatto type." Ferdinand Schevill in 1949 remarked that Alessandro's "villainous disposition coupled with his dusky skin, negroid lips, and crisp hair caused people to regard him as a monster and to put faith in the unsubstantiated rumor that his mother was a Moorish slave" (Schevill 204).

Historians have frequently repeated such descriptions, and Young's work continues to be cited in bibliographies on the Italian Renaissance. Eric Cochrane dismisses Young's "romantic nonsense" without noting its heinous racial politics (xiii). Christopher Hibbert, in 1974, stated that he would "offer a reliable alternative, based on the fruits of modern research, to Colonel Young's work, which Ferdinand Schevill has described as 'the subjective divagations of a sentimentalist with a mind above history'" (11). Yet Hibbert notes in his own book that Alessandro was a "dark, frizzy-haired" (251) youth who "indulged his young fancy for authoritarian rule and became ever more blatant in his sexual escapades" (254). Others focus on Alessandro's purported "licentiousness" (Cochrane 14), "womanizing" (Eisenbichler 290), and "wild behavior" (Cropper 20), observing that he was a "cruel and spoiled man unfit for rule" (Strehlke xi). Stated or unstated, the issue of "moorishness" or race remains a fascinating subtext. Caroline Murphy writes confidently in 2008: "Alessandro's mother was a Moroccan slave girl, and portraits of him show he was unquestionably black. Yet his dark complexion had proved no obstacle to his selection as Florentine ruler, for his Medici name trumped skin colour" (Murphy 9). Murphy's statement makes obvious the modern assumption that dark skin is a stigma that clearly marks the other. Notice the taxonomic shifts that have attended the historical accounts of Alessandro's status: from metaphorically mulatto and suspiciously Moorish to "unquestionably black," the categorical assertions by historians from the nineteenth century onwards demonstrate the increasing reification of race and the imperative to isolate difference. Moreover, the phrase "unquestionably black" is an example of presentism: unquestionable to whom—to us or to his contemporaries? If to us, then the statement is flawed, as "black" is by no means an unquestionable category. If to Alessandro's contemporaries, it is because "black" was surely not a concept beyond question.

The negative assessments of Alessandro's supposedly non-European appearance exist in concert with condemnation of his moral squalor—thus the findings of Italian historian and biologist Gaetano Pieraccini, discussed in

more detail below, that Alessandro displayed an abnormal interest in his “organi genitali” (“genital organs”), a fixation frequently alleged in the historiography on Alessandro. Eric Cochrane’s history, *Florence in the Forgotten Centuries*, begins after the events of Alessandro’s life, so his treatment of the first duke is cursory. In discussing the success of Cosimo’s subsequent rule, however, Cochrane writes that the so-called Republican exiles “found it harder” to criticize Cosimo when compared to his predecessor: “But Cosimo, who neither starved his mother, nor poisoned his relatives nor raped the wives of his subjects, turned out to have very little in common with any of the standard textbook tyrants” (42). Unfortunately, many of the charges against Alessandro are clearly derived from the “standard textbooks” read by chroniclers. The topological status of the charges against Alessandro has not been sufficiently examined; the record began as a rumor mill, but has now become an echo chamber. J. R. Hale, in *Florence and the Medici*, mostly steers an even-handed course, although he cannot resist verifying the charges of womanizing by describing Alessandro thus: “sexually the most voracious of his family, [Alessandro’s] rank reinforced his *beau-laid* charm so effectively that a rising toll of seduced daughters, wives and nuns not only scandalized . . . but alienated men . . . and it was appropriate that the trap that led to his assassination was baited with a woman” (142). While claiming to be skeptical regarding maternal heredity as a factor in Alessandro’s character, Hale does say that his “character is notably divergent from those of his forebears—wherever his paternity lay” (Hale, *Florence and the Medici* 123). Hale thus confirms Alessandro as “the other,” the black sheep of the Medici family.

### Physical and Somatic Traits

The epithet “il Moro” is applied to Alessandro increasingly in post-sixteenth-century accounts.<sup>19</sup> In fact, I have had a difficult time finding a sixteenth-century source that uses the term “Moro” for Alessandro. It was a nickname that could encompass an array of dark features—whether hair or complexion or both—but crucially, it did not have a racial significance. Comments about Alessandro looking like a *black*, *negro*, or *moor* derive mainly from later chronicles. John Brackett acknowledges “the difficulty of interpreting silences concerning what we call [Alessandro’s] ‘race’” (302). Most sixteenth-century accounts focus on the peasant or servile status of Alessandro’s purported mother, as recounted in Segni, Varchi, Guicciardini, and Giovio.<sup>20</sup> Alessandro becomes progressively racialized, and his looks, together with ideas that his

mother was not only a slave, but a black slave, pervade later works and have become a source of speculation in recent years. When Pontormo's portrait of Alessandro (fig. 1) was exhibited in 2001, the popular press took note of certain statements made about him, and the notion that Alessandro was the first black of African descent to rule a European city gained currency.<sup>21</sup> Debating North African versus sub-Saharan origins, viewers made minute examinations of his features, noting which were supposedly African, and asking questions such as "How much black [sic] African blood flows in the veins of contemporary European nobility?" (Posner R3). Itemized lists of Alessandro de' Medici's physical traits from both visual and printed sources feature in nearly all post-sixteenth-century accounts of his life. Such enumerations are patently not part of the biography or history of other Medici; one cannot imagine, for example, describing Duke Cosimo's curls, his bushy beard, the slant of his nose and color of his eyes, as a valid method of certifying his pedigree and his fitness for rule. Such physiognomic essentializing, unfortunately, shares characteristics with the nineteenth-century phrenologists and twentieth-century eugenicists: what they have in common is a belief that there *are* unquestionable racial traits, and thus the body can be read as a truthful complex of racial signs. Contemporaries of Alessandro did not have such a theory in mind when they commented on his physical characteristics. His curly hair was mentioned—but this was a common feature of the Medici. A large nose was noted—and yet the portrait galleries are full of prodigious Medici noses. Dark eyes and even dark skin are not unique to Alessandro, nor to the Medici family.<sup>22</sup>

The preoccupation with racial signs on the body of a Renaissance person is indicative of the naturalization of race within modern culture. Race is obvious to us in a way that it was not obvious for our early modern forebears. Indeed, we see what they missed because we are looking for it. As historian John Brackett considers, "did [Alessandro's] blackness have any meaning beyond defining his appearance to his contemporaries? To answer this question we must recognize that Alessandro and his fellow Italians lived in a world where race meant something substantially different than it does today" (313).<sup>23</sup> What has been lost in the debate about Alessandro's racialized looks is the human reality of the Mediterranean as a thriving world of cultural traffic and familial exchange, where differences were not always reduced to matters of race or skin color. The multicultural Mediterranean world is evident in the literature of Italy, which features many accounts of economic, political, and romantic contacts between Italian cities and those of Africa and the Levant.<sup>24</sup> Fernand Braudel notes the

importance of immigration, travel, and settlement throughout the area. In discussing Spain in the late fifteenth and early sixteenth centuries, Braudel describes it as “half-European, half-African” (1:118), while observing that southern Italy and Sicily enjoyed important “links with North Africa, that is the value of this maritime world which our imperfect knowledge or lack of attention has left without a trace” (1:117).<sup>25</sup> If one of Alessandro’s parents was of African ancestry, we must recognize that this may not have been scandalous or entirely anomalous. We must be prepared to go back to a period before the hegemony of race, when differences were perceived but not invariably conceived of as signs of natural hierarchy among varying groups. This period has been almost lost to history, beneath the crushing weight of the Atlantic slave trade and European colonialism, which in certain respects destroyed a horizontal multicultural world and established instead a fatal culture of racism, in which mixing or blending became the monstrous exception.

In a vital polyglot region such as the sixteenth-century Mediterranean, people would display a range of skin tones, hair and eye color, and of course the wide variety of features exhibited in human populations everywhere. We can even see this variety in Renaissance art, although artistic conventions and individual styles make it an incomplete record of lived reality. This is where the reductionism of eugenicist physiognomy has been particularly misleading: it works with “universals,” general and stock features, as though individuals are merely variants on phenotypic themes. Thus the racializing questions—how black is Alessandro? was his mother a dark African, or a brown Levantine? are his lips indicative of negro blood?—are wrong from the outset. Rather we should ask, how much African and Mediterranean “blood” is in any Italian, or European—that is, if it is possible to dissect racial essences, quantify pigment, and calibrate curl?<sup>26</sup>

In addition to acknowledging the diversity that defined medieval and early modern Mediterranean society at a time when the nation state did not exist, we should also pay heed to the frontier aspect of the lands now known as Europe. “Europe is both a region and an idea. The societies and cultures that have existed in this western extremity of the Eurasian land-mass have always been highly diverse, and the case for grouping them together as ‘European’ has varied from period to period” (Bartlett, *The Making* 1). Such studies offer compelling evidence of the internal colonialism in the centuries after the fall of the Roman Empire.<sup>27</sup> As warriors went in search of booty and gain, they also pushed the boundaries of their cultures into less fortified areas. Sometimes the

groups intermixed, but at other times they tried to maintain strict segregation, a classic case being the English in Ireland.<sup>28</sup> The historical models that highlight mobility and diversity offered by Bartlett and Braudel dispute the idea that human groups have existed as separate racial entities or stocks whose abilities are distributed differently due to innate characteristics linked to skin pigment, hair curl, or eye shape.

The existence of and demand for “Moorish” slaves, especially those of dark skin tones, might seem to prove that people were categorized along racial color lines at this time. Italian, Spanish, and French aristocrats emphasized exotic differences when they sought such individuals.<sup>29</sup> Historians and art historians often note this vogue for African attendants, witnessed also in the visual arts, to show the gulf that existed between light-skinned Europeans and a dark-skinned class of servants. The employment of exotic attendants, however, extended also to individuals possessing physical challenges, such as dwarves.<sup>30</sup> Slavery, it should be noted, occurred throughout the region—it was a matter of dismay that the Ottoman Sultan and other Muslims captured and enslaved Europeans. The majority of slaves, whatever their origin, were used for menial and back-breaking work, such as those who served on the galleys or in the fields, whether for the Spanish King, the Tuscan Grand Duke, or the Tunisian Bey.<sup>31</sup>

Given the complex cultural and genetic history of the Mediterranean region, the claims about the biological existence of race, whether Young’s statement declaring that the “mulatto” heritage of Alessandro was apparent to the scientific gaze of 1875 or the contemporary faith in DNA coding, must be carefully examined. Difference, racial or otherwise, can be made manifest in whatever manner a society requires. Indeed, the clear visibility of a supposed racial sign as a natural fact is often less a matter of the empirical reality of the racial other than of the theoretical bias of the racializing observer. As notions about race were formalized as natural or biological concepts in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, ideas about the inherent superiority or inferiority of cultural groups invited “scientific” justification. Such theories pervaded every sector of life and education in the western world and their colonies. Over the centuries of what Bartlett calls the “making of Europe,” borders changed and nations transformed and grew: “It is worth noting . . . that, while the language of race—*gens*, *natio*, ‘blood,’ ‘stock,’ etc.—is biological, its medieval reality was almost entirely cultural” (Bartlett, *The Making* 197). The modern concept of race developed gradually. In early modern Spain, no longer “half African,” as Braudel described it, reconquest and expulsion began to define the population.

It was not until the seventeenth century that “a crucial criterion for promotion and power was ‘purity of blood,’ a descent untainted by Jewish or Moorish ancestry. A blood racism of the modern kind had been born” (Bartlett, *The Making* 242).<sup>32</sup>

Considering the physiological diversity of the Mediterranean population, somatic features such as skin color were subject to interpretation depending on context, as may be demonstrated in the realm of artistic practice in the Renaissance. Both written descriptions and visual documents can be challenging because of the metaphorical use of traits and characteristics. Thus, “gold” hair may mean “shiny” as much as “blonde.”<sup>33</sup> Leon Battista Alberti, in his treatise on painting, notes “all knowledge of large, small; long, short; high, low; broad, narrow; clear, dark; light and shadow and every similar attribute is obtained by comparison . . . philosophers are accustomed to call these accidents. . . . Among the Spanish many young girls appear fair who among the Germans would seem dusky and dark” (54–55).<sup>34</sup> Cennino Cennini’s handbook notes conventions in painting a “handsome man” as “swarthy, and the woman fair” (Cennini 49). He gives further instruction in differentiating the delicate, often rosy complexion of the child from the colorless quality of the dead.<sup>35</sup>

Thus, skin color in the early modern period was observed along a continuum and was neither a fixed essence nor a necessary correlate of ethnicity. Christians, Muslims, and Jews were all understood as diverse peoples beyond the logic of race. Skin color helped Leonardo da Vinci discern the fallacy of Aristotelian biological theories denying the reality of a female “seed,” leading Leonardo to note that parents with different skin tones would have a child who shared the traits of both: “Here [Leonardo] adopts the Galenic position that both sexes contribute in equal part. [C]iting the ability of a white mother mating with a black father to produce a child of mixed color, Leonardo concludes that ‘the semen of the mother has power in the embryo equal to the semen of the father’” (Garrard 69). Leonardo also discounted climate as a factor in pigmentation: “The negroes in Ethiopia are not caused by the sun, because if a negro impregnates a negress in Scythia, she gives birth to a negro, and if a negro impregnates a white, she gives birth to a [child of mixed color]” (O’Malley and Sauders 484).<sup>36</sup> It is important to note that, from ancient times, the term “Ethiopian” was often taken to mean Black African; yet one must use caution even with this terminology. When Paolo Giovio included information about Ethiopia in his *Historiae*, he was concerned to implement a humanist methodology of comparative study and contemporary research. Giovio was

present when an embassy brought letters and gifts to Pope Clement VII in the name of the Ethiopian king, Lebna-Dengel. Giovio sought out a portrait of this king for his museum of famous men, and included a description of him (verified by Ethiopian monks resident in Rome), specifying that he was “not black, but brown . . . with waving, not curly, hair” (Tedeschi 106).

Antonio Palomino (1653–1726), biographer of painter Diego Velázquez (1599–1660), relates a legend about Velázquez’s portrait of Juan de Pareja (1606–70), his “slave and fine painter,” which is compelling in this context.<sup>37</sup> Palomino emphasizes how lifelike the portrait was—a familiar trope—adding that it was exceptional enough to exhibit in the Pantheon and to admit Velázquez into the painter’s academy in Rome. Later Palomino describes Pareja as (in Stoichita’s translation) “a dark-skinned mulatto.” In noting that Palomino omits Pareja’s race in the initial story about the remarkable portrait, only to add this feature later, Victor Stoichita reveals the ambiguity of skin-color and racial categories: Pareja’s slave status is never denied, but only in his own biography is he described as “*de generacion mestizo, y de color extrano*” (emphasis added). Mestizo could mean “mixed,” of different ethnicities, particularly for a child born of a Spanish father and Native American mother, while early uses of “mulatto” derive from the medieval use of “mulo” as a derogatory term for the illegitimate.<sup>38</sup> Palomino ends his tale of artistic nobility by saying that, despite the misfortune of his birth (as a slave), Pareja exhibited “genius, talent, and elevated thoughts [which] are the patrimony of the soul and souls are all the same color and are all forged in the same great workshop” (Stoichita 230–31).<sup>39</sup> Stoichita comments on the unstable use of

racial difference and skin color. . . . The color *black* is not mentioned by name, merely suggested by the turn of phrase *color extrano* [sic], which means ‘strange color,’ ‘foreign color,’ ‘different color,’ ‘undefined or undefinable color.’ The possible explanation is that as a *mulatto*, Pareja is neither black nor white; his color is ‘strange’ but undefinable. (231, emphasis added)

I agree that Palomino’s text is complex, but I disagree that it is timid or self-censored—why should Palomino mention “the color black”? How does the art historian know that Juan de Pareja *is* black? We may more meaningfully consider white, black, and mixed each as a contextually “undefined or undefinable color”—*color extrano*, resulting from peculiar, but mutable, practices of marriage, segregation, immigration, perception, and the like.<sup>40</sup> Where early mod-

ern people saw a diversity of skin tones, it seems that many moderns see only black and white.

In the effort to determine the heritage of Alessandro—or of anyone of the Medici family—one source has become unavoidable: Gaetano Pieraccini's *La Stirpe de' Medici di Cafaggiolo: Un saggio di ricerche sulla trasmissione ereditaria dei caratteri biologici* (*The Medici Branch of Cafaggiolo: An Essay in the Research of the Hereditary Transmission of Biological Traits*).<sup>41</sup> This work, as the subtitle indicates, is an example of a now-disavowed scientific approach. Pieraccini, a follower of the criminologist and eugenicist Cesare Lombroso (1835–1919), avidly measured features, determined symmetries, and scrutinized skulls in order to calculate how much of a certain hereditary biological tendency might be passed on in a single family, his grand example being the Medici, because of the wealth of documentary material and the equally important visual record of portraits. Pieraccini, who ordered the tombs of the Medici to be opened again in 1945, perhaps viewed the same skull that Young reported on (Pieraccini publishes a photograph of it), although the doctor judges it to have been “Eurasian” (Pieraccini 410).<sup>42</sup> While mentioning the “Moro” nickname, Pieraccini discounts African ancestry, especially because, while not attractive, Alessandro was not “odious, which excludes that he was negroid” (Pieraccini 402). Pieraccini relies on archival material, art, and exhumation to make his characterizations. His medical training and then-current anthropometric scientific models allow him to pronounce upon the shared biological traits of the Medici, many of whom, he freely admits, were deficient in some way.<sup>43</sup> By means of portraits, Pieraccini enumerates Alessandro's features according to Lombroso's metrics: the low forehead; the dark, abundant “fortemente ricciuti” (tightly curled) hair (410); the arms that, in proportion to his height, were much too long—these features, coupled with his tyrannical disposition, caused his contemporaries to call him “mulatto” (this word was not used in the racial sense by Alessandro's contemporaries), while science would define him as “un criminale od un criminaloide” (“a criminal or criminaloid”) with a disturbingly heightened attentiveness to his “organi genitali” (“genital organs”) (Pieraccini 408).

### Alessandro and the Visual Record: Who is He?

Race is often in the eye of the beholder, so it is hardly surprising that visual images have been used to buttress notions of Alessandro's race; in fact, much of the debate about Alessandro's heritage has come to rest on the evidence provided by certain portraits. I would like to examine the Florentine painter Jacopo Pontor-

mo's portrait of Alessandro (fig. 1) because it is a work Alessandro commissioned as part of an effort to establish himself as heir to the traditional Medici family role of patron of the arts. Lorenzo the Magnificent, Alessandro's ancestor, had carefully preserved the work of Tuscan artists, not merely the works of classical antiquity, while Lorenzo's son Piero was groomed as an art patron from a young age: in addition to works by Botticelli, "Piero bought a Cimabue in the first recorded instance of that kind of collector's taste" for Tuscan art of the previous centuries, rather than for contemporary works or for antiquities (Meltzoff 256).<sup>44</sup> Alessandro de' Medici also embodies this tradition of patronage.

From the earliest days of his rule, Alessandro commissioned works by Florentine and Tuscan artists. His portrait by Pontormo (fig. 1), now in the Philadelphia Art Museum, engages the viewer by means of Alessandro's direct gaze and his activity, which elicits a response. Many critics have studied this unusual presentation of a prince.<sup>45</sup> Its accessibility in an American collection and its latent controversy—that it represents not only a ruler assassinated for his tyranny, but one whose claim to Medici lineage is compromised by his illegitimate birth and by what some viewers perceive as his mixed race heritage—have made this image the focus of several recent exhibitions.

Leo Steinberg offered a poetic reading of the work in 1975 focusing on the figure of Alessandro engaged in the task of drawing, or *disegno*, an Italian term that encompasses both manual activity and intellectual contemplation.<sup>46</sup> Alessandro employs an outdated but difficult method of drawing, using a metal-point stylus, to outline the head of a woman in profile. Female profile portraits had been popular in the previous century. Steinberg, responding to Pontormo's innovative *concetto*, suggested that Alessandro was drawing Taddea Malaspina, his mistress. Vasari stated that Alessandro presented the painting to Taddea, allowing her to possess forever a likeness of her lover. Steinberg added that Taddea could then contemplate Alessandro depicted in the act of tracing her features. It is a witty conceit that foregrounds the accomplishment and sophistication of both artist and patron.<sup>47</sup>

In further establishing the portrait's context, Vanessa Walker-Oates, Carl Brandon Strehlke, Elizabeth Cropper, and Patricia Simons have analyzed poetry as well as the history of the *paragone*, or contest between the verbal and visual arts, with *disegno* as the foundation of all visual arts. *Disegno* had an additional significance, noted by Pliny: "it became the custom in Greece . . . for freeborn boys to be taught . . . drawing. . . . [Drawing was] esteemed so highly that only those who were born free practiced it, and later on people of rank did so" (Pliny 129).<sup>48</sup> The slanders



Fig. 1: *Portrait of Alessandro de' Medici*. Pontormo (Jacopo Carucci). Oil on panel, 1534–35. 39 7/8 x 32 1/4 inches (101.3 x 81.9 cm.). Philadelphia Museum of Art. John G. Johnson Collection, 1917. By kind permission of the Digital Collections and Services Department, Philadelphia Museum of Art.

most frequently made about Alessandro's mother during his lifetime were ones that suggested that she was a peasant or a slave. His knowledge of the intellectual art of *disegno*, then, would firmly establish his pedigree—he was a man of culture and civility—and serve as an elegant reply to such criticisms.

In Pontormo's portrait the Duke's somber vestments have been identified as mourning clothes.<sup>49</sup> Pope Clement VII (Giulio de' Medici), head of the Medici family since 1521 and suspected father of Alessandro, had died in September 1534, and Alessandro commissioned this portrait soon after. Pontormo's meticulous brushstrokes and "inventive handling in pursuit of refined and often understated effects" (Tucker et al. 47) indicate the slightly coarse, tweedy texture of the outer robe as revealed in a recent restoration:

Certain aspects of the costume and setting are notable. . . . one of the most remarkable of these effects . . . is extraordinarily subtle, considering the work and artistic determination it required, and indicates a creative intensity linked almost paradoxically to a particular notion of restraint. For the nubby black wool (called *casentino* in Florence) of Alessandro's costume the paint was applied in long strokes, . . . and then, while still wet, was worked in hundreds upon hundreds of tiny comma-shaped strokes. The effort was tremendous, but the fact that the final effect, while undeniably rich, is visible only on closest viewing suggests that it arose more from satisfaction of craft and intellect than from any desire for conspicuous virtuosity of handling. (Tucker et al. 47)

Alessandro, however, did appreciate Pontormo's refined artistry and paid him handsomely for the portrait, in addition to awarding him other commissions. Pontormo's superb skill confirms the patron's particular discernment.<sup>50</sup>

Alessandro's pose before a door or window that is slightly ajar confirms that this portrait was meant to invoke the recent death of Clement: "The feature of a shutter ajar, giving onto the view of an unspecified, ethereal beyond, formed the backdrop of Botticelli's portrait of Alessandro's own grandfather or great uncle Giuliano de' Medici" (fig. 2) (Simons 658). Leon Battista Alberti had written that "painting contains a divine force that not only makes absent men present . . . but moreover makes the dead seem almost alive" (63).<sup>51</sup> Portraits existed within families as a way to memorialize ancestors. The window or door ajar, however, is not the only commemorative image.

Pontormo evoked archaic Tuscan forms as well as antique practices when he painted his portrait of Alessandro.<sup>52</sup> In showing Alessandro engaged in the

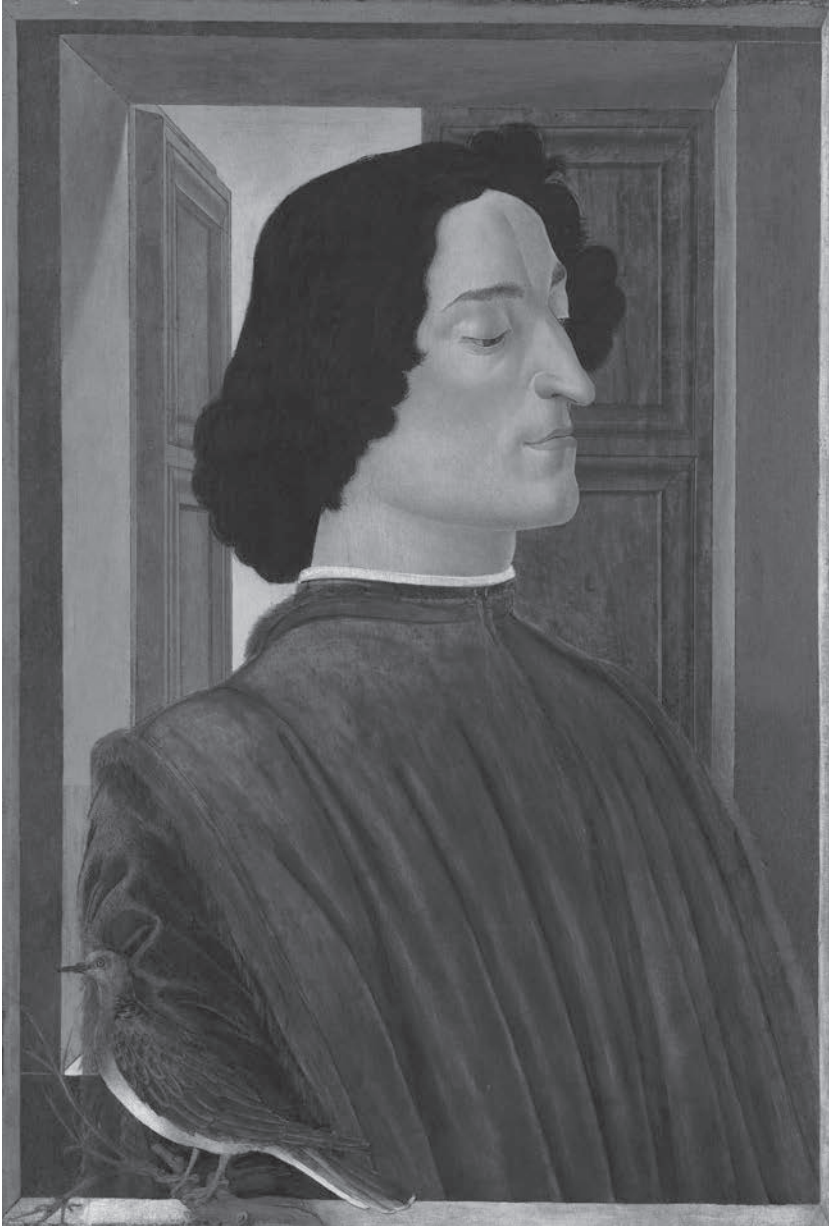


Fig. 2: Sandro Botticelli. *Giuliano de' Medici*. Tempera on panel. 75.5 x 52.5 cm. National Gallery of Art, Washington, D.C. Samuel H. Kress Collection 1952.5.56. Open access courtesy of the National Gallery of Art.

act of drawing a profile image with a stylus—that outmoded method—Pontormo and his patron Alessandro wished to make a particular statement about the Medici family during its time of mourning and crisis.<sup>53</sup> For this reason I would question the current interpretation of the profile head as that of a beloved, such as Taddea, or of an ideal beauty.<sup>54</sup> I view the woman's profile head as a portrait-within-portrait. Alison Wright has explained that “portraiture helps to construct memory” (87). In other words, “Pontormo's portrait of Alessandro plays with the complex interchange between presence and absence” (Simons 665). Pontormo foregrounded the symbolism of mourning and memory in this portrait.

Genealogy is an important concept in the artistic and biological sense. It bespeaks the need of any family, particularly a dynastic one, to procreate and to extend itself temporally both back into the past and forward, into the future. Records and images are crucial in reproducing the history of a family. Pontormo invokes this function by choosing the portrait-within-portrait format, which Botticelli, for example, successfully exploited in the previous century. In an earlier conception, Pontormo had included a figure glimpsed through the partially opened door (or window) of a “male upper torso in near frontal view with the head in truncated profile. The head has curly hair and a strong cheek and jaw” (Tucker et al 40). In a commemorative work, it seems plausible that the figure would be the ancestor Alessandro was mourning. Steinberg pointed out how Pontormo highlighted the orphaned nature of Alessandro, and the initial idea of representing the ghost of his father or guardian behind him—his progenitor in the past and protector now—has a certain cogency. The figure could be Lorenzo, Duke of Urbino, as that paternity was publicly sanctioned, or Clement VII.<sup>55</sup> Another connection can be established through Vasari's statement that *disegno* was “*padre*” (the father) of the three arts of painting, sculpture, and architecture. Rather than retain a background figure whose presence might upstage that of the Duke, Pontormo allowed the allusiveness of *disegno*, its intellectual pedigree and connection to motifs of paternity, to suggest Alessandro's father. Pontormo reproduced the work of his artistic ancestors, such as Botticelli, who portrayed the ancestors of his subject, Alessandro. In a thoughtful dialogue with the past, Pontormo evoked the famous posthumous portrait of Alessandro's tragically murdered forebear, Giuliano de' Medici (fig. 2), positioning Alessandro in a similar setting.

The young Giorgio Vasari also alluded to artistic genealogy when he painted the Duke in armor, again in the pose of a famous artwork, recalling

one of the statues by Michelangelo for the tomb monument of the Medici (fig. 3).<sup>56</sup> Vasari filled his portrait with numerous symbolic elements and easily spotted references to Medicean themes, such as the *broncone*: “That dried trunk of a laurel tree that sends forth the straight, fresh, leafy shoot is the House of Medici, once spent, that through the person of Duke Alessandro must grow in infinite progeny.”<sup>57</sup> The iconographical association of the laurel with Lorenzo il Magnifico and with the entire house of Medici was a long-standing one, a fitting metaphor for a family that experienced the vicissitudes of exile and glory so many times. Vasari mentions the numerous, infinite “*prole*” or descendants of Alessandro, since the commemorative aspects of these dynastic portraits are balanced by the triumphant allusion to future generations.<sup>58</sup>

Unlike Vasari’s carefully coded symbolism, Pontormo’s restrained and dignified imagery of Duke Alessandro responds to several of the charges against Alessandro’s reputation. The allusion to his paternal protector blunts the stigma of spurious birth and lowly origins, while Alessandro’s skill in drawing responds to the slur that he was “half-slave,” at the same time absolving his mother of mean status. While the act of *disegno*, the father of the arts, dignifies this orphaned son, the profile image, too, may be read as commemorative.<sup>59</sup> From the late fifteenth through the sixteenth century, many portrait subjects hold medals or cameos of their ancestors or of family members. Pontormo’s use of the conventions of his artistic forebears places him in a venerable Florentine tradition, while allowing him to suggest an absence that has haunted accounts of Alessandro de’ Medici: that of his mother. I submit that Alessandro is drawing not a lover, as hypothesized by Steinberg, but his absent mother—a woman he neither hid nor poisoned out of shame.<sup>60</sup> As stated at the outset of this section, Alessandro commissioned this work and he would have taken care about the message it conveyed. Walker-Oakes writes that the “portrait should be viewed as a construct, a fiction garbed in the deceptive cloak of naturalism” (129) as most portraits are. Pontormo presents Alessandro as a pensive and grieving prince, while in the portrait by Vasari, he is shown as a protector of Florence’s peace. The topic of the latter work is fairly standard, while the former makes pride in ancestry its subtle theme.

The existence of a number of copies of Pontormo’s portrait of Alessandro attests to the practice among European royalty of owning images of each other as well as to the particular fame of Pontormo’s conception. Contemporary comments about these portraits are notably free of racial insinuation, which is



Fig. 3: Giorgio Vasari. *Ritratto del duca Alessandro de' Medici* (1510/12-1537). Oil on panel. 157 x 114. Firenze, Galleria degli Uffizi, Inv. 1890 n.1563 (inv. fot. 584581). By kind permission of the Ministero dei beni e delle attività culturali e del turismo.

not the case with recent descriptions, some of which betray an apparently self-evident emphasis on the greater beauty and dignity of light skin, straight hair, blue eyes, as in a recent article about Alessandro co-authored by historians Massimo Firpo and Salvatore Lo Re.<sup>61</sup> Here they attempt to confront the unknown as regards the Duke's background by examining a newly identified copy of his portrait alongside the fragmentary chronicle evidence and later histories—wherein Alessandro's looks are never separate from his *mala fama*, his sexual excesses, and his eventual, seemingly justified, murder.

Firpo and Lo Re's serious consideration of these elements is welcome, but they manage only to exacerbate the charged racial rhetoric by concluding that the blue eyes given to Alessandro in one copy signal a literal whitewashing of his background. They argue that the eyes are a gift, a cover for Alessandro's less desirable brown eyes, just as the light skin of a different portrait improves his looks.<sup>62</sup> Firpo and Lo Re then focus on Alessandro's hair, so that the common custom of wearing a hat during the Renaissance is taken as evidence that Pontormo wished to hide Alessandro's racialized features. Like the blue eyes, the looser curls of some copies are offered as flattering upgrades of the Duke's image, as well as a palliative to his potentially embarrassed successors. In other words, according to Firpo and Lo Re, Pontormo whitens his black subject, whereas Firpo and Lo Re themselves may have blackened a subject of indeterminate race. Few scholars have decided to leave Alessandro as undecided: neither black, white, nor brown, possessed of a kind of identity that perhaps we can no longer imagine and that we no longer have a word for.

Alessandro's hair is described as "*crespi*," which is often translated into English in this context as "woolly," or "kinky"—words currently used to describe tightly curled African hair.<sup>63</sup> Petrarch, an inspiration to artists of all kinds, described the beautiful Laura as having "*chiome bionde et crespè*" (383), an adjective used frequently for the highly desirable curly hair, typically an attribute of beauty in the Renaissance.<sup>64</sup> Visual evidence reveals a wide range of hair textures in Renaissance art, which is not so much a statement of ethnicity as of human diversity. When translating the poetry of Petrarch, or other poems featuring idealized beauty, "*crespi/crespè*" is not rendered as kinky, frizzy, or woolly, but instead as curly or wavy.

Firpo and Lo Re reiterate and paraphrase descriptions of Alessandro's "somatic traits, 'brown color, thick lips, and curled hair,'" to differentiate them from "white traits" (32). The historians go so far as to state that better artists hide those features intentionally. They define him thus: "The brown coloring of

his skin, the thick lips, the sparse hairs of an incipient beard on his chin, *all reveal the genetic patrimony transmitted to him by his mother*" (Firpo and Lo Re 34, italics added). As if with a checklist, Firpo and Lo Re go through the different portraits in order to determine who favors the duke with non-"African" traits. One portrait, from Bronzino's workshop, includes all the purportedly damning features of Alessandro's racial inheritance along with the inscription "ALEX. MED. FLOR. DUX I LAUREN. F.," which Firpo and Lo Re read as being "seemingly in counter-point" (Firpo and Lo Re 38). They claim that the painter's choice to portray a blue-eyed Alessandro was

a clear attempt to hide or mask as far as possible the deplorable contamination of the blood that ran through the veins of this 20-year-old bastard of the pope who—in 1531—more by "fortune" than by "virtue," to tell the truth, had suddenly become head of the "government" of Florence and a year later "Duke of the Florentine Republic." (Firpo and Lo Re 39)

Cosimo was forced to celebrate Alessandro in some manner, because it was he who established a Medicean line of dynastic rulers; according to Firpo and Lo Re, Cosimo rehabilitated Alessandro by whitening him. Occulting Alessandro's offending hair, skin color, and other "tratti somatici" was thus a way of allowing him into standard Medici genealogies.

### Alessandro's Legacy

How is it possible to understand the political role of Alessandro, occluded as it has become by nationalistic and racialized rhetoric? Works that celebrated Alessandro's brief life were written and published before and after his death, but many more encomia were written later for the living duke Cosimo while he could provide patronage and other benefits. Cosimo encouraged positive sentiments toward Alessandro, but he was more concerned about his own heirs. Subsequent writers have not challenged or deconstructed the information from anti-Medicean accounts with regard to Alessandro, resulting in an unbalanced portrayal that focuses on lurid charges of debauchery and cruelty. Nicholas Scott Baker has compared some of the chronicles and reports of Alessandro's life to those of his successor, Cosimo. Baker focuses on the sexual excess imputed to Alessandro and suggests that these attacks were used to prove Alessandro's unsuitability for rule.<sup>65</sup> Such accusations fit into the topological pattern George Steiner has described: it was common to include in the biography of a historical subject personal details and rumors about that indi-

vidual's life. When that subject's legacy was deemed negative, charges of sexual debauchery were standard—they even occurred in the unfriendly chronicles and broadsheets concerning Cosimo. But, overall, there are more positive accounts of Cosimo, including those he elicited and those produced by courtiers. The favorable accounts of Alessandro appear meager in comparison. Benedetto Varchi is frequently cited as a source because he wrote, at Cosimo's behest, a lengthy account of the history of Florence focusing on the siege and the defense of the last republic.<sup>66</sup> It is unclear how favorably Cosimo received the completed *Storia* from Varchi, since it was not published until the eighteenth century, even though Cosimo made efforts to facilitate the publication of other histories, such as those of Guicciardini and Paolo Giovio.<sup>67</sup>

Named a tyrant by the Florentine exiles (*fuorusciti*), Alessandro was accused of debauchery and sexual perversion, but a comparative analysis of these accounts and their historical inspirations (the lives of Caligula and Nero being particularly good sources of atrocity, freely plagiarized by zealous rhetoricians, such as Lorenzino in his *Apologia*) shows the power of that oft-repeated rhetoric.<sup>68</sup> At a hearing before Emperor Charles V in Naples in 1535, Francesco Guicciardini presented a refutation to the exiles' charges against Duke Alessandro of tyranny, cruelty, and sexual excess. Guicciardini focused on the constitutional and judicial changes carried out in the transformation of Florence from Republic to Duchy, before dealing briefly with the exiles' more personal accusations.<sup>69</sup> Most, according to Guicciardini, were fabrications based on the textbook tyrants, while others were the petty disputes that have always existed, particularly among the aristocrats, regarding their marriages and love affairs. Two of the most notorious crimes laid to Alessandro's charge, the alleged poisoning of his cousin, Cardinal Ippolito de' Medici (1511–35), and the murder of Luisa Strozzi Capponi (d. 1534), were not mentioned by the exiles, among whom were relatives and friends of the victims—including the father and brothers of Luisa Strozzi Capponi. This unexplained lacuna was noted in the nineteenth century by Ferrai and Rossi, but has been disregarded by later historians intent on showing the evil of Alessandro, who, as a bastard of base origin, must be demonized for their own ideological purposes.<sup>70</sup>

Alessandro's reign has become synonymous with the violent end of the Florentine Republic; however, the early years of Alessandro's government were marked by a slow recovery from war, siege, food shortages, and disease. There were tragic reprisals such as banishments, imprisonment, and executions of

some of the supporters of the previous republic. Statistics regarding execution and banishment need to be given their full context.<sup>71</sup> In addition to the warfare between the Habsburgs and the French fought on Italian soil, political violence had become a perennial reality.<sup>72</sup> The first years of Duke Cosimo's rule were violent, repressive, and unstable, despite later mythologized histories and chronicles that sought to glorify his rule. While he is credited with defeating the exiles of Montemurlo in 1537, this was only accomplished with the aid of the imperial army—the same one that had abolished the last republic in 1530 and secured Florence for Pope Clement and Alessandro. Furthermore, Cosimo was elected as Head of Florence without first receiving permission to use the title of Duke. Cosimo ruled at the pleasure of the Emperor, who at this time denied the hand of his daughter, Alessandro's widow, to Cosimo.<sup>73</sup>

In the aftermath of siege and warfare, the Medici had “to prove themselves capable of restoring the prosperity of the city . . . , and Alessandro and his advisers set about this task almost at once. The last republic had almost ruined the *monte di pietà*” (Menning 135) and other financial institutions.<sup>74</sup> Many reforms attributed to Cosimo were begun by Alessandro. The condemnation of Alessandro and the praise of Cosimo are not so much evidence of the latter's greater authority and manliness; a fairer assessment would see Cosimo's harsh and oppressive policies as a response to Alessandro's fate:

The zealous pursuit of malfeasance must be traced directly to Cosimo's personality and statecraft. He never forgot the end met by his predecessor Alessandro, and he himself had had to suppress an attempted revolt by exiles at Montemurlo. Experience had conditioned the duke to expect conspiracies everywhere. (Menning 229)

Alessandro enjoyed some status as the champion of the poor and helpless, as ballads and novelle record. Anton Francesco Doni included an account of Alessandro rescuing a miller's daughter from rape, requiring that the perpetrator marry her with a rich dowry augmented by funds from an accomplice to the crime, while Matteo Bandello published a similar “true story” in his *Novelle*, along with another about Alessandro castigating the greed and violence of one of his courtiers, upholding instead the rights of an exile.<sup>75</sup> The artist and writer Giorgio Vasari, who in the mid-1530s made money by copying portraits of Alessandro and other members of the Medici family for various local patrons, recounts many anecdotes regarding Alessandro, particularly with regard to his patronage of art and his generosity to young artists like himself.<sup>76</sup>

Despite such redeeming narratives, the mysteries of Alessandro's parentage contribute to the overall negative assessments of his life and character, and the sudden, violent end to Alessandro's life remains almost as mysterious as his birth and childhood and contributes to speculation about his lineage: "*Qualis vita, finis ita* goes the Latin proverb, or as Giovanni Rucellai recorded in his *Zibaldone*: 'There is a popular saying that in a good life there is a good death. . . .' This belief that the manner of a person's death mirrored the quality of his life helps explain why Renaissance people had such curiosity about how death occurred," notes Melissa Meriam Bullard (S186). Alessandro's assassination by the hand of his distant relative Lorenzino seemed to confirm his reputed tyranny. Basic factual errors regarding Alessandro's assassination and its aftermath have only recently been corrected, however. Stefano dall'Aglio discovered and analyzed archival material that showed how tenaciously Emperor Charles V pursued the assassin of his son-in-law after becoming impatient with Cosimo's lack of success on this score.<sup>77</sup> The public outcry against Lorenzino and the lengthy manhunt for him have become obscured by the rhetoric of patriotic tyrannicide and a thinly veiled defense of ethnic purity. Thus, murdering the "negroid" or Moorish bastard of another bastard (Giulio de' Medici) was a justifiable and even heroic act, if we are to believe several nineteenth- and twentieth-century Italian histories that helped to popularize this notion. This interpretation is enshrined in the multi-volume reference dictionary, the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (GDLI), where words such as "mulatto" and "mulo" are illustrated by means of rhymes that denigrate Clement VII and his reputed son, Alessandro.<sup>78</sup>

Knowledge continues to be produced and evaluated, and ideological positions carry their bewitching narratives into history books and reference works. The lemmas of the *GDLI* record derogatory references to blackness, miscegenation, and bastardy with regard to Alessandro who is the modern Italian textbook case of a mulatto savage, while his putative father, Clement VII, remains the exemplary bastard *mulo*. The interests of later historical actors, especially with regard to negative perceptions of difference, are served by citing such examples, but the current definition of "mulatto" offered in the *GDLI* retains a bigoted tenor:

A mixed-race person deriving from the crossbreeding of a white man with a black woman or vice versa, having *intermediate anthropological characteristics particularly featured in the shape of the nose, in the cut of the lips, in the*

*aspect of the hair* and in the color of the skin that varies from light bronze to dark brown. (s.v. “mulatto” 2, emphasis added)<sup>79</sup>

Such a definition differs little from the scandalous lampoons of Lorenzino and the Florentine exiles; indeed, it could have been written by Cesare Lombroso or Gaetano Pieraccini. This racialized ideological formulation can only prevent an objective assessment of Alessandro de’ Medici—or inhibit an undistorted account of him in the archives of Renaissance history.

When historians of art and society refer to Alessandro as unquestionably “black” because of the way that he looks or behaves, the effect of this argument is to strip blackness of its history and to make it something timeless, essentially the same in all times and places. This in turn reifies race as a fixed or basic category in human experience. “Black” comes to mean a sub-Saharan African subject, who must always be black. But black may also have the meaning of a person of color in the sense of being “non-white” and in this regard it can include people from North Africa and elsewhere. In brief, the term “black” shows how the taxonomic concept of race is radically unstable—Juan de Pareja, for example, is considered by some to be at least partly black, making him a “mulatto” with a fixed core of blackness. “An obvious question undoubtedly arises,” write David Bindman and Henry Louis Gates Jr.: “what then defines a black person in the context of these volumes [of *The Image of the Black in Western Art*]? Because so many images . . . lack external documentation, the answer is usually that of appearance: a person or persons who *look* as if they are of black African descent” (“Preface” xiv). The argument from ocular proof is a problematic one that continually threatens to bewitch and destabilize the category of identity.

Sally McKee has shown, in her study of the Venetian colonization of Crete, that “the link between ethnicity and slavery was forged in the effort to establish who could *not* be enslaved” (125)—Venetian paternity “led automatically to free status” (124). This determination seemed necessary as intermarriage between the Latins (Italians) and Greeks proved impossible to prevent. Purity of blood (Christian whiteness) is just as contentious as impurity—the mulatto, mestizo, morisco, and other hybrid statuses suggest that otherness may be lurking within. Much later and farther north than medieval Crete, David Dabydeen finds that, in eighteenth-century England, “blacks were assimilated into lower-class white society . . . , finding pleasure, companionship and a degree of protection among the ranks of the common people. [I]n 1768 Sir John Fielding . . . complained that the English ‘mob’ protected runaway blacks” (39).

The search for traces of the “other”—of the African in Italy or England, or the Portuguese in Africa or India—might lead to the discovery of alliances and attitudes less fraught with exploitation and violence, and it might place the categories of European and white in a less mystified and central position. The case of Alessandro de’ Medici makes manifest the compelling intersections of high and low, European and other, which may be the rule rather than the exception in the early modern world.

## NOTES

1. I would like to thank John Brackett for sharing drafts of his work on Alessandro de’ Medici and for engaging in thoughtful email exchanges, which were helpful despite our different approaches. F. Elizabeth Hart has been a meticulous and supportive reader of this essay, for which I am most grateful. Cathy Schlund-Vials and Chris Vials offered lively critical dialogue on race and theory, as well as friendship and solidarity. Most of my research was possible thanks to the excellent holdings and helpful staff of the Homer Babidge Library at the University of Connecticut; I am especially indebted to their superb InterLibrary Loan department. Jerry Phillips is my best reader; I have benefitted much from his wide-ranging and generous intellect.

2. See Lippi, “Diseases” and *Illacrimata sepulture*; Valdes Y Cocom, “Alessandro de’ Medici: Renaissance Race Card?”; and Mueller. Alessandro de’ Medici’s tomb was opened in 1875 and 1947.

3. See Spicer, ed.; “Africans in the Renaissance,” Dobrzynski, and Cembalest.

4. See Brackett; Bromfield. Literary works include Alfred de Musset, *Lorenzaccio* (1834) and Alexandre Dumas, *Lorenzino* (1842). On the Strozzi family, cast as defenders of Florentine liberty and victims of Alessandro, see Niccolini, *Filippo Strozzi. Tragedia* (1847) and Rosini, *Luisa Strozzi. Storia del secolo XVI* (1833). In English literature, examples include James Shirley, *The Traitor* (first quarto 1635), and Thomas Middleton, *The Revenger’s Tragedy* (1607).

5. One story used to confirm Alessandro’s supposed debauchery is that Maria Salviati de’ Medici “founded” a convent for the numerous daughters Alessandro fathered—this Boccaccian tale must surely be examined with skepticism; see, e.g., Langdon, *Medici Women* 235n171.

6. Steiner’s theories are utilized effectively in Bullard, “Storying Death.”

7. As Lowe acknowledges, “The necessary next step of trying to integrate what is known about West African societies in these centuries with what is known about the black Africans reduced to slavery in Europe has not taken place, and most European Renaissance historians remain woefully ignorant of African historical cultures and traditions” (“Stereotyping” 19). See also Davis, Epstein, and Vitkus.

8. On patrilineal marriage and Renaissance architecture, see Wigley. On gender and family, see Klapisch-Zuber 283–309 and Haas.

9. “The genealogies that [Florentines] draw up . . . were often uniquely masculine: daughters and wives were eliminated, or mentioned only when the alliances they helped to acquire had been particularly useful to the lineage” (Klapisch-Zuber 284).

10. Wright writes that “by the end of the quattrocento, portraits of women painted earlier in the century could lose their identity as had the sitter in the portrait described in the Medici palace inventory of 1492 as ‘una testa di una dama di mano di maestro Domenico da

Vinegia” (106). On marriage, concubinage, and legitimacy, see Ertlinger; Lansing “Gender and Civic Authority” and “Concubines, Lovers, Prostitutes”; and Kuehn. Kuehn examines legitimacy petitions in the legal records of Florence, although the issue transcended civic law codes and could be accomplished through ecclesiastical means.

11. Historians Roth, Virgili, and Stephens observe that the archival records are sparse from the Medici restoration in 1512, their expulsion in 1527, and following the last republic (1531–37)—almost exactly coinciding with Alessandro’s lifetime; see Roth 108n3, 109n22, 112n77, 339n35; Virgili 483–84; and Stephens, *The Fall*. Brackett reviews past accounts and attempts to reconstruct Alessandro’s childhood by examining the situation of the Medici in exile when Alessandro would have been born. Hale comments on the “fragmentary nature of the sources for the entire period covered by this study [1530s]” (“The End” 505). Important recent studies include Simoncelli; Dall’Aglio; Rebecchini; Baker, “Power and Passion,” “For Reasons of State,” and “Writing the Wrongs of the Past”; and Langdon, “A Reattribution,” “Pontormo,” and *Medici Women*.

12. See Azzolini, “The political uses” 137–38, and Varchi, *Storia fiorentina* 3:191. See also Vanden Broecke, who examines the horoscopes of Giuliano Ristori (1492–1556), Girolamo Cardano (1501–76), Luca Gaurico (1475–1558) and the refutations of Sixtus van Hemminga (1533–86); and Westman. Spini’s entry on Alessandro in the *Dizionario Biografico degli Italiani* is brief and has not been updated.

13. See Azzolini, *The Duke* 16–19. A “comprehensive analysis” and refutation of earlier interpretations of Alessandro’s geniture is undertaken by Hemminga 105–16.

14. See Spini; Brackett; and Hallman.

15. See Foster. See also the valuable information provided in folliott and in Stephens.

16. Foster names Ottaviano, i.e., 422, as a guardian of Alessandro; Varchi notes that Ippolito was under the tutelage of Galeotto de’ Medici (1523–26) and Alessandro under that of Giovanni di Bardo Corsi, “letterato” (1:64–65). Paolo Giovio seems to have had a role as advisor to both Ippolito and Alessandro; see Zimmermann 147.

17. Trollope notes elsewhere that Alessandro’s “life was one continued orgy” (*Filippo Strozzi* 211).

18. Although much of Young’s work is disavowed by historians of the Renaissance, it is included in bibliographies and ought to be confronted as well as refuted. Brackett states that “Young and Trollope come close to assigning the young duke to a different race but pull up short of that unimaginable conclusion” (320).

19. The term “Moor” has evolved throughout the centuries. For background, see Bartels, Hall, Boxer, Barbour, and the helpful discussion in Langdon, *Medici Women* 231–33n140; as well as Bindman and Gates Jr., eds., *The Image of the Black in Western Art*, especially volumes 2 and 3.

20. Segni writes that Alessandro was “nato di una schiava chiamata Anna [sometimes written as Arena]” (1:163). Giovio, a longtime intimate of the two Medici popes, wrote that Alessandro was called “*per ingiuria bastardo, nato d’una fante contadina*” (186, italics added), and later, Giovio provides a physical description, emphasizing Alessandro’s strong build; see 243. Simons noted that “The surviving polemic against Alessandro does not single out his race, focusing instead on his mother’s lowly status” (658).

21. See the chronology of attributions and research in Langdon, *Medici Women*, ch. 4; Langdon, “Pontormo and Medici Lineages”; and Posner.

22. Franco, describes young Giulio di Giuliano de’ Medici as having brown skin (“cera brunaza e sana”), a description repeated about the older Giulio (later Pope Clement VII). Franco distinguishes Giulio’s healthy color from the pallor of Giovanni, the future Pope

Leo ("non di molto colore") (see *Lettere* 83). Guicciardini writes that Giuliano, Lorenzo the Magnificent's third son, was "di colore nero" (123–24). Excessive paleness was frequently a sign of weakness or ill health, or, in the case of women, of their secluded, indoor lives. The literalness with which color descriptors are accepted warrants scrutiny, as these terms are neither transparent nor ahistorical. The point here is that color descriptions are flexible; see Groebner, *Who Are You?*, especially "Reds and Blacks" (129–36), and "Who Is White?" (136–41).

23. Brackett is correct to note what appear to be dispassionate descriptions of Alessandro's appearance in sixteenth-century texts. Yet I would problematize Brackett's assertion "that Alessandro was what we could call today a black man, that is, a man of mixed white and African descent" (310).

24. See for example, Boccaccio, *Decameron* I:9; II:7 and 9; III:10; IV:4; V:1 and 2; VII:9; X:8. Other collections by Masuccio Salernitano and Matteo Bandello contain a similar variety, and, indeed, many such stories derive from writers of the varied cities, nations, and kingdoms of and around Italy.

25. Braudel's fundamental work is assessed by Marino in "Braudel's Mediterranean: Italy," and "The Exile and His Kingdom: The Reception of Braudel's 'Mediterranean.'" McKee is of critical importance for its investigation into the "myth of ethnic purity" presupposed by the insistence on categorizing populations with regard to racial and ethnic essences.

26. The difficulty in pinpointing what is meant by "black" and "black African" is evident in studies such as those collected by Earle and Lowe. In this context the story of Alessandro gains additional significance. See Lowe, "Introduction" and "Stereotyping"; Barbour; Bindman and Gates Jr., "Preface," and, in the same volume, Kaplan, "Introduction to the New Edition." Eliav-Feldon, Isaac, and Ziegler, eds., contains many valuable articles, especially Bartlett, "Illustrating ethnicity"; Groebner, "The carnal knowing of a coloured body"; and Biller, "Proto-racial thought," although my position differs from the interpretation of Biller, in particular. McKee offers a strong argument against the myth of "ethnic homogeneity" on which terms like "European" and "white" depend; see especially her conclusion (168–77).

27. The history of early modern Italy forms a continuum that includes Spanish and Portuguese trade and empire; see, for example, Bartlett, *The Making*; Braudel; Earle and Lowe, eds.; Bartlett and MacKay, eds.

28. Modern students of racial ideology have often pointed to Ireland: "The most extreme form of legal discrimination in the colonized peripheries of Europe was to be found in Ireland" (Bartlett, *The Making* 214); further, "The harshest form of legal inequality, which took the form of an absolute denial of law, was found, remarkably, not in areas of conversion or clash of religion like Spain or the Baltic, but in Ireland" (220). See also McKee 13–18.

29. Cochrane recounts the types of diplomatic gifts Cosimo I de' Medici sent, "like Bronzino's *Deposition*, now in [Granvelle's] gallery of Besançon, knowing that he would receive similar tokens of esteem—like a couple of Moorish slaves for Eleonora—in return" (45); see also Kaplan, "Italy, 1490–1700"; Davis; Matar; Dursteler; Necipoglu; and Romano. An early study by Iris Origo presents the material in so one-sided a manner as to be more instructive for its Eurocentric prejudices than for the archival material she produces.

30. People born with achondroplasia and pycnodysostosis are referred to as "dwarves." See Leroi and Fleming on the treatment of individuals whose body types were considered to be outside of the normal. The majority of servants and slaves were not exotic.

31. Robert C. Davis writes that even in 1631, “enslavement was not something that white Europeans did to other people, to black Africans in particular. . . . During these years, when the English share of the Atlantic slave trade still averaged barely 1,000 Africans annually, the Algerian and Salé rovers may have been enslaving almost as many British subjects every year from the scores of ships they were taking; by 1640 upwards of 3,000 British were enslaved in Algiers alone (and another 1500 or so in Tunis)” (3). See also McKee, on the Venetians in Crete, where “this must be one of the very first occasions in the pre-modern era when legal enslavement was ethnically and not religiously determined” (125), and Epstein.

32. See also McKee 173. On the treatment of Jews and other minorities in Europe, see Hsia; Nirenberg, *Communities of Violence*; Moore; and Waddington and Williamson, eds.

33. See the descriptions of the famous portrait of Giulia Gonzaga by Sebastiano del Piombo. Walter and Zapperi remark on the obligatory references to Giulia’s blonde hair, “manifestamente esemplato su quello attribuito da Petrarca a Laura, [which appear] senza badare al colore dei capelli del ritratto di Giulia, che non lo erano affatto” (87). Groebner is helpful in historicizing physical description in *Who Are You?*

34. Alberti’s *On Painting* was published first in Latin, then in Italian. The Italian reads: “E apresso agli spani multi fanciulle paiono bianchissime da appresso a germani sarebbono fusce e brune” (108–09); in Latin: “Apud hispanos pler[ue]q[ue] virgines candide putantur que apud germanos fusce et altri coloris haberentur” (108–09).

35. See Cennini on painting the young, 45–46; the aged, 47–48; and the dead, 94–95.

36. The use of “negro” is from O’Malley and Sauders’s translation; on the two-seed theory, see also O’Malley and Sauders (454) for the influences of Galen and Lucretius on Leonardo. Groebner notes that Jean Bodin, in 1566, subscribed to the climatological explanation for skin color, while “Samuel Purchas’s *Hakluytus posthumus* (published in England in 1625) departed from the medieval notion that the color of human skin is determined by climate, place, and astrological constellations” (*Who Are You?* 138–39), although Leonardo had observed this over a century earlier.

37. See Stoichita. Diego Velázquez’s portrait of Juan de Pareja, circa 1650, is in the Metropolitan Museum in New York.

38. *Mulo* referred to a child born to parents of different social status—noble and peasant, free and slave, or Spanish/European and Native American or African. See the usages in the *Grande dizionario della lingua italiana* (GDLI). The term *mulo* was used for both Alessandro and his wife, Margherita (natural daughter of Charles V), by detractors and in pasquinades to denote their illegitimacy. *Extrano*, which occurs elsewhere signifies “foreign” in the context of skin color; however, Palomino does not use the term *mulatto*—he writes “*mestizo*” (373n132).

39. Montague discovered the notarial act that accorded Juan de Pareja his freedom, and it dates from Velázquez’s Roman visit of 1650. Pareja, who is named after his father, came from Antequera, a city “which, prior to the expulsion of the moors in 1609, had had a large Moorish population” (Montague 684).

40. See Stoichita 231. Unfortunately there has been little research on African or “foreign” descriptions of Europeans and their diverse skin tones. A recent study by Peter Erickson adds further nuance to the debate on subjectivity and race in the visual arts. In “Invisibility Speaks: Servants and Portraits in Early Modern Visual Culture,” Erickson studies a wide range of paintings in an effort to present European ideas of race and oppression. Erickson’s diachronic approach reaches up to contemporary artists who incisively talk back to a tradition that enshrines prejudicial notions of Africans while masking the cruel exploitation carried out by white masters, slavers, and colonizers. The present essay has

similar concerns, but I focus on the image of one man—or rather, the multiple images that this singular subject represents.

41. All translations are the author's.

42. On Alessandro's skull, Pieraccini writes: "Thus, if Alessandro did not have more apparent degenerative cranial and facial *stigmata*, nor true and actual material deformities (in which case his detractors would not have hesitated to reveal them), he at least had structural peculiarities of his head, such that he was defined by contemporaries as 'hardly beautiful' and that earned him the epithet of 'mulatto'" (410). Kemp (232–42) includes an analysis of Cesare Lombroso. Epstein presents other Italian interrogations (influenced by Lombroso) of the supposed Eastern Mediterranean influence on lower-class Italians due to the high percentages of Mongol, Tartar, Greek, and Circassian slaves (xi–xii).

43. Being born out of wedlock is considered a defect similar to a physical or mental disability by Pieraccini and Lombroso: "a degenerative coefficient can be found in the illegitimacy of birth" (407).

44. See Bellosi on Piero di Lorenzo and his fragment, believed to have been painted by Cimabue.

45. See Clapp, "Un ritratto di Alessandro de' Medici" and *Jacopo Carucci da Pontormo*.

46. See Steinberg 62–65.

47. See Vasari 278; Steinberg 62. Steinberg was the first critic to suggest that Alessandro was drawing his mistress Taddea, an interpretation that has gained widespread acceptance; see Simons 655. A letter of 1571 written by a former member of Alessandro's household, Costantino Ansoldi, states that *he* gave the portrait to Taddea after the Duke's death; see Clapp, *Jacopo Pontormo* 280; Simons 665.

48. Alberti also notes this in regard to the nobility of art: see *On Painting* 65–67. Steinberg also links Alessandro's activity to Pliny's text. Antonio Palomino, in his life of Juan Pareja, stresses that, as a slave, Pareja could not be taught to paint or draw "(out of respect for the art)" (Stoichita 229; in the Spanish original 373n132). But Pareja's innate talent and inner nobility triumphed so that he gained his freedom and embarked on a career as an artist; see Stoichita 229.

49. See Ansoldi's letter in Clapp, *Jacopo Carucci* 280; see also Simons. On dark clothes, see Walker-Oates 134; on Michelangelo's wardrobe more generally, see Wallace.

50. Giorgio Vasari, *Le Vite*, vol. VI, p. 278f. Steinberg places a different emphasis on Vasari's anecdote about the price of the portrait.

51. Simons quotes a slightly different translation in her essay (see 665). See also Walker-Oates and Bialostocki.

52. Wright writes, "The psychological phenomenon by which an inner mental image of familiar figures long absent becomes increasingly tied to their recorded likeness must have become a more common experience . . . with the increase in individualised portrait images especially in funerary and votive art" (87).

53. See Simons 658.

54. The suggestion that Alessandro may be drawing an ideal head, of the type Michelangelo drew, is made by Strehlke 114 and Cropper 21. Firpo and Lo Re pay tribute to Pontormo's splendid portrait of Alessandro, although they add that the artist painted him "seated and intent on drawing the profile of a woman (an indirect allusion to his insatiable passions)" ("Gli occhi" 32), thus suggesting that Pontormo managed to castigate the morals of his patron, the Duke.

55. It is important to note that the idea of a lineage/casa meant that uncles assumed the role of fathers on the death of their brothers, as Lorenzo il Magnifico did when Giuliano

was assassinated, and as Giuliano's son Giulio did for Ippolito, Alessandro, and Caterina. On this aspect of Giulio (Pope Clement VII), see Hallman 29–40.

56. On Vasari's portrait of Alessandro, see Campbell and Cheney.

57. Giorgio Vasari, *Der Literarische Nachlass*, 28. A transcription of the letter may be found in the appendix to Malcolm Campbell, "Il ritratto del duca Alessandro," 360–61.

58. Alessandro was the father of at least one of his two children with Taddea Malaspina and perhaps of another daughter. While these children were not legitimate, they were certainly a promise of future progeny. Langdon notes that natural children served as a kind of "blood bank" or reserve in the event that legitimate offspring died off (*Medici Women* 44). Of the four exiled Medici males in 1512, only two had children, a rather poor insurance policy. The mistresses and lovers of young noblemen were an important testing ground for dynastic heirs, and the additional children often played a significant role in family strategies. Walker-Oakes also notes the genealogical motifs (132–33) and Medicean themes (137).

59. Wright 97.

60. On Alessandro's mother, see Brackert and Benedetti. The latter is helpful for gathering references in one location. Benedetti's statement that no one has seriously cast doubts "sull'autenticità" of the letter from "la v.ra Cara madre Simunetta" (60) to Alessandro is not accurate; it has been questioned, not least because the original seems to have disappeared and it exists only as a transcription. Casanova and Saltini record that "Simunetta's" letter was considered apocryphal a century before they wrote (in the 1890s); see Casanova 152; Saltini 323.

61. Firpo [and Lo Re], "Gli occhi azzurri di Alessandro de' Medici," reprinted with revisions in *Storie di immagini*; I will quote from the revised edition, in which Lo Re's collaboration is mentioned only in the "Nota ai Testi" xxi.

62. See Firpo 41–42.

63. In fact in some societies the tightness of hair curl is considered more indicative of African heritage than skin color. Apartheid-era South Africa maintained a hair test to back its policies.

64. Petrarch uses this adjective repeatedly for Laura's hair.

65. See Baker, "Power and Passion." For another interpretation of Alessandro's death with an emphasis on issues of sexuality and gender, see Jed, "Making History Straight" and *Wings for our Courage*.

66. See Varchi. On Varchi's reliability, see Dall'Aglio and Albertini 339–46.

67. Publishing histories are significant. The popular book, *Delle azioni e sentenze del S. Alessandro de' Medici primo Duca di Fiorenza ragionamento di Alessandro Ceccheregli fiorentino*, is one of the positive works discussed by Baker, who writes "Alessandro Ceccheregli's dialogue, which served as an exception to the rule in praising Alessandro as a protector of women, was published in Venice rather than in Florence. While not conclusive evidence, this fact does strongly suggest the possibility that the book lacked Cosimo I's imprimatur" ("Passion and Power" 456). Ceccheregli's work, reprinted at least ten times, may have been published first in Venice because that was the center of book production in Italy; see Richardson. On Ceccheregli, see Bramanti.

68. See Medici. Albertini provides a valuable analysis of sixteenth-century Florentine historians such as Nardi, de' Nerli, Segni, and Varchi; see 306–51. Hale cites the *Memorie* of Francesco Maria Settignano's for accounts of arrests, but this was written centuries later; see "The End" 510n8. D'Addario offers an assessment of Settignano; see 420–23.

69. For Nardi's report on behalf of the exiles, see Varchi 3:100–107; for Alessandro's response (crafted by Guicciardini), see Varchi, 3:128–49.

70. Ferrai noted that *after* Alessandro's death Filippo Strozzi, a prisoner in the fortress, wrote in his will that "he remembered all his children living and dead, [but] he never named [Luisa]" (148n). See Rossi for research on several of the named victims of Alessandro, examining the high levels of street violence that occurred in Florence during this tense period; see also Casanova.

71. See Baker, "Power and Passion" and "For Reasons of State." Judging Alessandro by his very brief reign presents obvious problems in any comparison.

72. Baker has analyzed the rise of political executions as opposed to exile as punishment in Florence in an effort to trace the city's slow and violent evolution into a duchy; see "For Reasons of State." He notes that the numbers must be used with caution, as they are not complete.

73. Parigino gives a thorough accounting of Cosimo's precarious financial circumstances; Najemy mentions Cosimo's reliance on borrowing (see 474–75). Cochrane discusses how "Cosimo ended up having to pay rent even on the Palazzo Medici" (37) because his branch of the family had no hereditary right to this palace (it remained the object of a lengthy dispute between Catherine de' Medici, Queen of France, and Margaret of Austria).

74. Menning also notes that "Alessandro and Clement VII displayed political finesse in their choice of ministers" after the return of the Medici (131). She adds, "The tendency begun by Alessandro to retain control over important decisions thus continued under Cosimo" (188).

75. See Doni, *I Marmi* I:76–81; Bandello, *Le novella*, seconda parte, novella 16: "Bell'atto di giustizia fatto da Alessandro Medici Duca di Firenze contra un suo favorite cortegiano." The positive, even encomiastic accounts of Alessandro are discussed in Pellizzari. Among the ballads are two, one about Alessandro's assassin, Lorenzino, in which Lorenzino is characterized as a hateful traitor and murderer, *Il pietoso lamento che fa in se stesso Lorenzino de' Medici come ammazzo' l'Illustrissimo Signor Alessandro de' Medici composta per M. Lorenzo Ghibellini da Prato*, and the other featuring the dead duke and celebrating his life, *Lamento del Duca Alessandro de' Medici Primo Duca di Fiorenza*; see Fanfani 33–47 and 49–66. On the commemorative celebrations for Alessandro conducted in Spain by his father-in-law, Charles V, see Molina.

76. See Vasari, especially in his life of Pontormo, *Le Vite* V.VI, 245–289 and in his *Ricordanze* the entries for 1532, 1534, 1536. In 1534, Vasari painted not only the portrait of the duke armed but also three other versions of varying size. In her study of the close advisor and distant relative, Ottaviano de' Medici, Braccianti details the collection maintained by Ottaviano of Medici dynastic portraits, many commissioned posthumously; see also Strozzi.

77. Dall'Aglio, "La vendetta dell'imperatore" 243–57. On plots and conspiracies in Italy at this time, see Lowe, "Conspiracy and its Prosecution in Italy."

78. GDLI, s.v. "mulatto"; lemma drawn from Policarpo Petrocchi, *Novo dizionario universal della lingua italiana*, s.v. "mulatto."

79. GDLI reads "Meticcio derivante dall'incrocio di un uomo bianco con una donna negra o viceversa, avente caratteri antropologici intermedi particolarmente connotati nella forma del naso, nel taglio delle labra, nell'aspetto dei capelli e nel colore della pelle che varia dal bronzo chiaro al bruno scuro."

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