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Santa Barbara

Visual Poetics, Racial Politics: Seeing Citizenship in Multiethnic US Literatures

A dissertation submitted in partial satisfaction of the

requirements for the degree Doctor of Philosophy

in English

by

Maite J. Urcaregui

Committee in charge:

Professor Stephanie Leigh Batiste, Co-Chair

Professor Candace Waid, Co-Chair

Professor Felice Blake

Professor Swati Rana

Professor Jennifer Tyburczy

June 2022

The dissertation of Maite J. Urcaregui is approved.

Felice Blake

Swati Rana

Jennifer Tyburczy

Stephanie Leigh Batiste, Committee Co-Chair

Candace Waid, Committee Co-Chair

June 2022

Visual Poetics, Racial Politics: Seeing Citizenship in Multiethnic US Literatures

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by

Maite J. Urcaregui

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This dissertation is dedicated to the memory of my father, Angel Urcaregui, whose own experience with citizenship I saw only in glimpses. I wish you could tell me more.

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VITA OF MAITE J. URCAREGUI
June 2022

EDUCATION

Doctor of Philosophy in English, University of California, Santa Barbara, Santa Barbara, June 2022

Ph.D. Emphases in Black Studies and Feminist Studies
Graduate Certificate in College and University Teaching (CCUT)

Master of Arts in English, University of Colorado, Boulder, Boulder, May 2016

Graduate Certificate in Women and Gender Studies

Bachelor of Arts in English, *magna cum laude*, Gonzaga University, Spokane, WA, May 2013

PROFESSIONAL APPOINTMENTS

Assistant Professor, Department of English & Comparative Literature San José State University, 2022
Teaching Associate, Department of English, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2018-2021
Teaching Associate, College of Creative Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2021
Teaching Assistant, Interdisciplinary Studies, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2020
Teaching Assistant, Department of English, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2017-2020

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

"'A revelation not of the flesh, but of the mind': Performing queer textuality in Alison Bechdel's *Fun Home*." *The Routledge Companion to Gender and Sexuality in Comic Book Studies*, edited by Frederick Luis Aldama, Routledge, 2021, pp. 365-374.

"Creating Another World: Gathering(s) against Injustice." (co-authored with Nadia Ahmed, Stephanie Leigh Batiste, Anita Raychawdhuri, and Erick John Rodriguez). *The Black Scholar*, 6 Nov. 2020.

"(Un)Documenting Single-Panel Methodologies and Epistemologies in the Non-Fictional Cartoons of Eric J. García and Alberto Ledesma." *Prose Studies* (special issue on Latinx Studies), vol. 41, no. 2, 2020, pp. 207-227.

"Intersectional Feminism in *Bitch Planet*: Comics, Fandom, and Activism Beyond the Page." *Gender and the Superhero Narrative*, edited by Michael Goodrum, Tara Prescott, and Philip Smith, University Press of Mississippi, 2018, pp. 45-73.

AWARDS

Graduate Collaborative Research Award, Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, UCSB, 2022
Graduate Fellow, Arnhold Undergraduate Research Program, UCSB, 2021-2022
Excellence in Teaching Award, Graduate Student Association, UCSB, 2021
Literature Fellow, College of Creative Studies, UCSB, 2021
Dissertation Fellowship, Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, UCSB, 2021
Hillary Chute Award, Comics Studies Society, 2020
Dissertation Fellowship, Graduate Division, UCSB, 2020
Pearce Dissertation Award, Department of English, UCSB, 2020
Graduate Collaborative Research Award, Interdisciplinary Humanities Center, UCSB, 2020
William and Marjorie Frost Graduate Writing Award, Department of English, UCSB, 2019
Graduate Fellow, Andrew W. Mellon Engaging Humanities Initiative, 2019
Humanities and Social Science Research Grant, Graduate Division, UCSB, 2019
Teaching Achievement Award, Department of English, UCSB, 2018

ABSTRACT

Visual Poetics, Racial Politics: Seeing Citizenship in Multiethnic US Literatures

by

Maite J. Urcaregui

My dissertation develops an emerging and significant nexus of literary and visual studies to examine the relationship between and among visuality, racialization, and national belonging. In the United States, racist and colonialist visual tropes and caricatures continue to shape who is seen as a citizen in ways that have profound material consequences. While these representations have been widely discussed within visual studies, literary scholars have yet to engage in detail the ways that authors deploy visual aesthetics in their work to represent, reframe, and resist these controlling images. This project excavates a tradition of visual poetics within a unique archive of contemporary Black, Indigenous, and Latinx multimedia literature that collages word and image to critique the category of citizen while envisioning belonging beyond citizenship's purview. Reading multimedia literature alongside contemporaneous visual archives and critical race histories, my work creates a lexicon for analyzing literature's visual imagination and the dynamic ways that multiethnic authors hack into it to redraw the boundaries of belonging. Visual citations, such as the iconic empty hoodie that appears on the cover of Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) or the Bureau of Indian Affairs blood quantum charts that Deborah Miranda remixes into satirical art in her *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013), not only speak to the way that racialized visual discourses surveil and circumscribe who is included within the category of citizen but also rearticulate the cultural work of these images. These visual poetics are not mere mimetic portrayals of normative national frameworks of inclusion: they precipitate new routes of seeing and reading belonging by variously envisioning alternative networks of recognition, care, coalition, and community.

Methodologically, this work builds from the mosaic strategies and multimedia forms of these dynamic literatures as I juxtapose, collage, and interweave Black, Indigenous, and Latinx literatures. This juxtapositional approach to multiethnic US literature examines citizenship as a category that cuts across differently racialized communities while also attending to glimpses of coalitional affinities that exist within these distinct literary traditions and their visual poetics. Chapter One analyzes Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) alongside the author's photographic collaboration with Gordon Parks, "A Man Becomes Invisible" (1952), to theorize the epistemological, aesthetic, and political implications of visibility that ground the more contemporary works that follow. Chapter Two explores Black feminist reorientations of the (in)visibility that Ellison and Parks depict by examining moments of visual hyperlinking in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* (2014), which uses intertextual references to visual art to critique anti-Black racism and redirect its gaze. After grounding my work through Black literary and visual cultures, the second half of the project traces the interconnections of racism, colonialism, and global capitalism while attending in tandem to cross-racial solidarities. Chapter Three explores Chumash and Ohlone Costanoan Esselen author Deborah Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2012), a multi-media memoir that collages word and image to expose and combat the visual imperialism of the settler colonial archive. Chapter Four analyzes the methods used by Latinx comics artists to redraw national borders and thus remap criminalizing discourses of citizenship through their single-panel comics. I look to two collected works, Eric J. García's *Drawing on Anger* (2018) and Alberto Ledesma's *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* (2016), to examine the ways that the comics border or panel, as a focalizing and framing device, invites viewers into new ways of seeing citizenship as a constructed and contested category.

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Introduction

Constructing Sites/Sights of Citizenship through Visual Culture

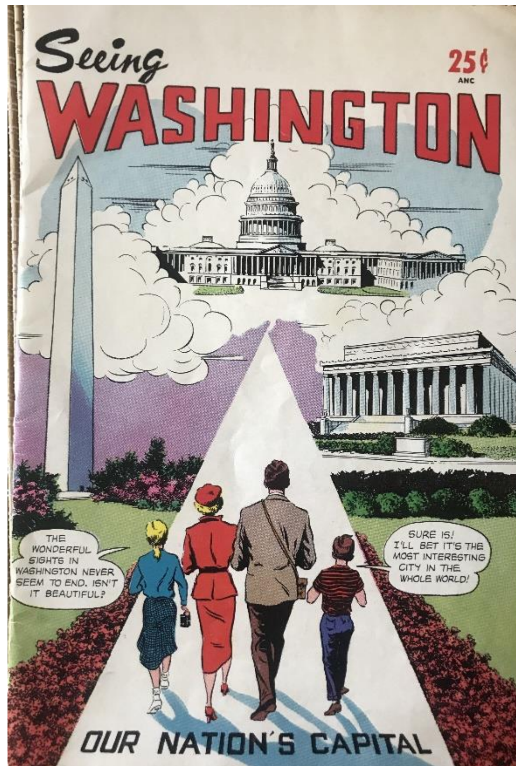

Figure 1. The cover of Malcolm W. Ater's *Seeing Washington* comic (1957) illustrates how vison, visuality, and visual culture construct citizenship. The pyramid points to that citadel of citizenship, the Capitol Building.

Under what conditions does citizenship—a category that works through naturalization (in more ways than one) and often only makes itself visible in moments of crises—come into view? What terms of seeing shape the fantasy of citizenship and who is included within it? Malcolm W. Ater's 1957 comic *Seeing Washington* elucidates the ways that vision, visuality, and visual culture are not only complicit in but actively co-create national narratives of identity and belonging.[1] It follows a White nuclear family as they tour Washington D.C. with

[1] Malcolm W. Ater, *Seeing Washington* (Washington D. C.: Commercial Comics, Inc., 1957). *Seeing Washington* was published by Commercial Comics, Inc., a now defunct company that Ater owned that specialized in "the production of custom-made educational comic booklets for government, business and

their tour guide and uncle, Uncle Ben.[2] Uncle Ben stands in for the ideal citizen, a White man whose parroting of national narratives of exceptionalism not only attests to his own patriotism but also indoctrinates others, in particular the two children,[3] into this nationalistic imaginary. In the contemporary moment of the comic's original publication and circulation, he would have stood in optic opposition to another "Uncle Ben" in popular culture, the

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industry." While *Seeing Washington* is certainly propaganda that attempts to "arouse a greater appreciation for the privilege to say, 'America, My Home,'" according to the comic, it is not the most violent or overt propaganda that Commercial Comics would go on to publish. In 1984 the company would covertly partner with the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to create a work of comics propaganda that was airdropped over Grenada during the US invasion that sought to position US soldiers as White saviors and protectors of human rights, rather than participants in a US-led government overthrow and takeover. In 1950, just two years before the "A Man Becomes Invisible" piece that I analyze in Chapter One, *Life* magazine did a profile of Ater that bemoaned the use of popular media as political propaganda, grumping, "As if radio, TV, sound trucks [*sic*.], matchbooks and skywriting were not enough, the politicians are assaulting the senses of the electorate this season through yet another medium, the comic book." See "Malcolm Ater, 77, Dies," *The Washington Post*, May 13, 1992, https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1992/05/12/malcolm-ater-77-dies/a9652f22-fe4e-4bed-91c3-f21252739910/.

[2] Throughout this chapter, I capitalize both Black and White to typographically recognize them as racial identities that have specific histories both within the United States and globally. This stylistic choice, like all questions of style, is also political. See Ann Thúy Nguyễn and Maya Pendleton, "Recognizing Race in Language: Why We Capitalize 'Black' and 'White,'" *Center for the Study of Social Policy*, May 23, 2020, https://cssp.org/2020/03/recognizing-race-in-language-why-we-capitalize-black-and-white/. In their report, Nguyễn and Pendleton recognize that capitalizing both Black and White "emphasizes the critical importance and permanence of these words as real, existing identities."

[3] Queer theorists have critiqued the way that the political gets figured through the child as the ideal citizen, whose innocence demands protection but does not place any demands for accountability on the nation state. Lee Edelman, for instance, argues that the "Child remains the perpetual horizon of every acknowledged politics, the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention." Edelman rejects this "reproductive futurism," the coercive belief that the maintenance of heterosexual reproduction and the nuclear family is paramount to the political. Perhaps we see this no more clearly than in the ongoing debate over abortion in the US (one that is not yet a national conversation about reproductive justice) where individual states and the nation state use the figure of the unborn child to circumscribes the reproductive choices of people who bear children. This figuration of the innocent child is one that is extended only to White children, and Edelman has been critiqued for ignoring these racialized dynamics in his disavowal of the future. As José Esteban Muñoz points out, Edelman's "anitrelational thesis" is one that attempts to distance from "the contamination of race, gender, or other particularities that taint the purity of sexuality as a singular trope of difference." Rebecca Wanzo also critiques Edelman's figuration, arguing, "But one of the many absences in his influential argument is attentiveness to children who are consistently designated as lacking a future, or whose futures are considered destructive for the state. Youth touched by drugs, crime, and teenage pregnancy—often imagined as children of color—are children that the conservative state fights for in a paradoxical way." See Lee Edelman, *No Future: Queer Theory and the Death Drive* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 3; José Esteban Muñoz, *Cruising Utopia: The Then and There of Queer Futurity* (New York: New York University Press, 2004), 11; and Rebecca Wanzo, *The Content of Our Caricature: African American Comic Art and Political Belonging* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 143.

smiling caricature of a Black man used to sell "Uncle Ben's Rice" from 1947 to 2021.[4] With Uncle Ben as their guide, the family marvels at "the wonderful things in our nation's capitol," including Capitol's Statuary Hall, the Hall of Representative, The Washington Monument, the Lincoln Memorial, and other national monuments, as Uncle Ben guides them through the visual and architectural iconography of the capitol: the geographic, political, and symbolic seat of the United States (US) nation state. The cover of the comic illustrates the role of visual culture in the imagination of national identity as it imagines this idealized family walking an increasingly narrow path (see Fig. 1). The path becomes an isosceles triangle—a pyramid of power—that occupies the center of the page and encompasses the family. Its lines lead the family and the viewer's gaze toward a celestial point, the Capitol Building, which sits on a bed of clouds on the horizon. Their sightseeing ends in a dream-like state. The real site of the Capitol Building is not as stable as its neoclassical architecture might suggest. Here, emerging through an ethereal backdrop of blue sky and fluffy white clouds,[5] it is revealed for what it is: a shifting symbol, on unsteady ground, in the imaginative construction of the US nation state and its illusion of democracy.[6]

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[4]The company, Mars Food, only recently changed the name and image of the product in response to global protests against anti-Black racism at all levels of society that rose in the wake of George Floyd's murder. See "Uncle Ben's rice changes name to more 'equitable' brand," *BBC News*, September 23, 2020, https://www.bbc.com/news/business-54269358. Within comics culture, specifically, "Uncle Ben" might recall Spider Man's benevolent uncle whose death inspires the superhero's journey, but that character would not be created by Marvel until 1962.

[5] The inner dome of the actual building uses similar celestial imagery, showing George Washington's ascension into the clouds of heaven. In a reversal of this celestial representation of the Capitol Building, Carole Boston Weatherford and Jamey Christoph's children's picture book on the life of Gordon Parks, whose photographs I analyze in Chapter One, pictures the Capitol as an ominous symbol of racial inequality, noting how "In the shadow of the Capitol, he [Parks] sees black families living in alley dwelling," describing the shanty dwellings and communities that were occupied disproportionately by Black Americans in the post-Depression era. Carole Boston Weatherford and Jamey Christoph, *Gordon Parks: How the Photographer Captured Black and White America* (Chicago: Albert Whitman & Company, 2015), no page.

[6] I draw here from Benedict Anderson's work on how national communities are imaginatively constructed. Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* Revised Edition (New York: Verso, 1991).

Even as sites like the Capitol Building are part of the imaginative construction of the US nation state and, thus, signify differently in different settings or through different ways of seeing, I want to underscore that these sites are firmly grounded in White supremacy and coloniality, as is the US. Swati Rana makes this clear in her analysis of the January 6, 2021, riot at the Capitol Building, an event which speaks to the symbolic slipperiness and steadfastness of this site. Reading the visual remains of the riot, Rana observes that "images from the January 6 riot make clear the white supremacist terms upon which entry into the U.S. Capitol is premised. While these scenes are new and unprecedented, they are not an aberration [. . .] To the extent that the rioters stand for antidemocratic, fascist, and racist principles, it is not surprising to see them inside the Capitol Building. They are a feature of the system. This is their house, and they write on its walls with impunity."[7] As these scenes show, the Capitol Building is a site of statecraft upon which national narratives are written and violently upheld. Following Rana, who "reads the artifacts" of the Capitol "to understand how people of color hold and reshape power," I analyze how authors and artists of color use visual culture to rewrite the sites and sights of citizenship in order to carve out alternative spaces of belonging beyond its purview.

Visual Poetics, Racial Politics: Seeing Citizenship in Multiethnic U.S. Literatures, examines and critiques the ways that US citizenship coheres around imagistic concerns and monumental imaginaries. Comics scholar Rebecca Wanzo notes how stereotyping, generalization, and caricature create "visual grammars of citizenship," or ways of seeing, that are deployed frequently in the United States to construct "both ideal and undesirable types of

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[7] Swati Rana, "Reading the Artifacts After the Capitol Riot," *The Paris Review*, January 19, 2021, https://www.theparisreview.org/blog/2021/01/19/reading-the-artifacts-after-the-capitol-riot/.

citizens."[8] My dissertation uncovers the dynamic ways that multiethnic US authors and artists hack into these visual grammars of citizenship to create a new syntax of belonging—national, political, and otherwise. I excavate a network of twentieth and twenty-first-century Black, Indigenous, and Latinx multimedia literatures that collage poetry and prose with visual art to reveal citizenship's contradictions and exclusions. The images they create work beyond the narrow vision of inclusion. Through their visual poetics and multimedia aesthetics, these works model a kaleidoscopic gallery of relationships to the nation state: (in)visibility, opposition, satiric subterfuge, and redirection.

Here, citizenship becomes a site of seeing, one that employs racialized visual discourses to demarcate who belongs within the US. While "Citizenship is now a codified juridical concept," as Carrie Hyde points out, "it continues to be an elastic site of political fantasy and debate."[9] Visual culture has long been a locus where these political fantasies of citizenship are debated, contested, and circulated. This political cartoon by C. J. Taylor, which appeared in the June 26, 1889 issue of *Puck*,[10] makes clear how the visual cultures and discourses around citizenship are shaped by shifting understandings of race and ethnicity (see Fig. 2).[11]

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[8] Wanzo, *The Content of Our Caricature*, 5.

[9] Carrie Hyde, *Civic Longing: The Speculative Origins of U.S. Citizenship* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2018), 7.

[10] *Puck* was an American humor magazine that ran from 1871-1918 and was a precursor to *MAD Magazine* founded in 1952 by Harvey Kurtzman and William Gaines.

[11] C.J. Taylor, "The Mortar of Assimilation," in *Puck*, June 26, 1889, Smithsonian Institution's National *Museum* of American History, https://americanhistory.si.edu/collections/search/object/nmah_1465288.

Figure 2. C. J. Taylor's "The Mortar of Assimilation," published in the June 26, 1889, issue of Puck. Image courtesy of the Smithsonian Institution's National Museum of American History.

The cartoon pictures a boisterous Irish immigrant, who wields a blade and waves the green flag of the "Clan na Gael," an Irish republican organization in the US. The portrayal of the Irish man is vaguely simian-featured, as is the visages of some of the other racial and ethnic minorities (all men) within the pot,[12] such as the Black man just to the right of the Irish man's knee. The use caricature reduces specificity into visual excess, reducing people of across ethnic, racial, and national identities to a simplistic set of phenotypical signals and, as is often the case in the history of caricature, eliding their humanity. As the man precariously dances on the edge of the melting pot, here portrayed as a civilized teacup that reads

[12] Some of the men are also dressed in military attire, which suggests both that militaristic violence compels immigration and that participation in such violence is one route to assimilated citizenship. The soldier, particularly the White soldier, holds a privileged place in the ideology of US citizenship.

"CITIZENSHIP," he threatens a worried-looking Columbia figure, who wears the US flag as an apron as she attempts to stir those within the pot with the silver spoon of "equal rights" and thus assimilate them within the engraved category of "CITIZENSHIP." The cartoon caption underscores the assimilative nature of her work, "Mortar of assimilation – and the one element that won't mix," imagining the Irish, who at this time had not yet been fully consolidated into Whiteness,[13] as incommensurable with American ideals of citizenship. The violence of the image lies not in the knife, dripping with blood, but in the bludgeoning effect of the spoon, which attempts to melt racial, ethnic, and national difference into the homogonous stew of American citizenship. This vision of citizenship enforces a national unity where, according to Anderson, "regardless of actually inequality and exploitation" that prevail, "the nation is always conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship."[14] The US's "melting pot" is not a place of radical inclusivity, but one of violently enforced assimilation, one that has been inaccessible to, yet continuously fueled by, people of color.[15] While Columbia cooks the men into the stew of "CITIZENSHIP," it is worthy of mentioning that, despite wielding that large spoon of equal rights, women would not be granted voting rights until the Nineteenth Amendment was ratified in 1920, a right that was for the most part only granted to White women in practice until Civil Rights activism spurred the Voting Rights Act of 1965.

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[13] The consolidation of various European ethnic groups into Whiteness would not gain momentum until after World War II in an intention effort to resist integration and further buttress anti-Black racism and segregation.

[14] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 7.

[15] I invoke Eduardo Bonilla-Silva's statement "that melting pot never included people of color. Black [people], Chinese [people], Puerto Ricans, etcetera, could not melt into the pot. They could be used as wood to produce the fire for the pot, but they could not be used as material to be melted into the pot." I return to this idea in Chapter Four. Eduardo Bonilla-Silva quoted in "Episode Three: The House We Live In," *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, directed by Llewellyn M. Smith (San Francisco: California Newsreel, 2003), film, 00:11:13-30.

While my project examines the visual discourses of US citizenship from the latter half of the twentieth century into the contemporary moment, this cartoon to speaks to the how visuality can both compel and reveal crises in citizenship. The visual grammars of the cartoon underscore the ways in which the category of citizen is shaped by racial discourses that, even as they have shifted over time, have always hinged on the exclusion of Black, Indigenous, Latinx, and Asian peoples.[16] Citizenship and its political benefits and protections, as Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith conclude, are part of the US's "racialized social system," "a society where social, economic, political, and psychological benefits and disadvantages are doled out along racial lines."[17] Visual culture does simply represent but participates in the creation of these exclusionary ways of seeing. Lauren Berlant maintains that, while the experience of citizenship is "intensely individuating, [. . .] it also makes people public and generic: it turns them into kinds of people who are both attached to and underdescribed by the identities that organize them."[18] Citizenship operates through a narrow field of vision that attempts to turn people into generic, repeatable visible types, or stereotypes, as Taylor's cartoon iterates, although to very different political ends than my analysis here.

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[16] Much of the legal and cultural discourse that barred citizenship throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries were, in fact, created to exclude Asian immigrants, such as the Chinese Exclusion Act of 1882, which placed a ban on Chinese laborers (who built much of the nation's railways and infrastructure) and was the first to prevent entry to the US on the basis of national identity, and the 1924 Immigration Act, which rolled back the quota system to favor immigration from Western Europe while effectively preventing immigration from Asian countries. The 1924 Immigration Act also established a US Border Patrol. The exclusion of Asians and Asian Americans from US citizenship is an important part of the visual genealogy that I trace in this project but receives little attention in my focus on Black, Indigenous, and Latinx literatures. I plan to remedy this exclusion in my future plans for this project.

[17] Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith, *Stay Woke: A People's Guide to Making All Black Lives Matter* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 99.

[18] Lauren Berlant, *The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Essays on Sex and Citizenship* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1997), 1.

The history of the stereotype underscores the role of print making and visual culture in the creation and circulation of these images of citizenship. A stereotype refers to a printing process developed in the late eighteenth century in which words and images were locked into place and then cast onto a metal plate called a stereotype. This single plate, thus, captured the elements of an entire page and could be repetitiously used in a print run.[19] The durability and repeatability of the stereotype speaks to the more figurative and contemporary usage of the term. Rebecca Wanzo plays with the original technological meaning of the word to reveal how "the reproduction of a generalization about a group over and over again" creates a typology of citizenship.[20] These visual typologies, as Berlant observes, disproportionately stick to "historically stereotyped citizens," those who do not have "the freedom to feel unmarked." Historically, these have included people of color, women, and queer and trans people.

The objectifying gaze of citizenship that Berlant describes is not totalizing in its effect. While this project is interested in the ways that race and citizenship get projected onto the body through visual practices, it is also invested in the ways that people of color navigate, redirect, circumvent, and subvert this objectifying gaze. Frantz Fanon, explicating the experience of being a Black man living in colonial territory, confronts the White gaze, noting how "in the white world, the man of color encounters difficulties in elaborating his body schema. The images of one's body is solely negating. It's an image in the third person."[21] Those negating images of the body "in the third person," are mirages that do not and cannot

[19] See "stereotype, n. and adj.," *OED Online*, Oxford University Press, December 2021, www.oed.com/view/Entry/189956; "stereotype," *Encyclopedia Britannica*, January 6, 2009, https://www.britannica.com/technology/stereotype-printing.

[20] Wanzo, *The Content of Our Caricature*, 5.

[21] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 90.

capture the lived, embodied ways that people of color construct their own self-images. For Fanon, this construction of self goes beyond a reactive relationship that is always beholden to the White colonial gaze. He describes how the maneuvers that people of color make as they navigate racist and colonial spaces creates an implicit knowledge that constructs a "body schema." The body schema is "a slow construction of my self as a body in a spatial and temporal world [. . .] It is not imposed on me; it is rather a definitive structuring of my self and the world—definitive because it creates a genuine dialectic between my body and the world."[22] The slow work of constructing a body schema emerges from daily acts of navigating the spatial and temporal words—those daily acts that define experiences of citizenship and belonging, the work of survival. That work of image making, of self-fashioning is both destructive and creative. It works within, against, and on the White colonial gaze, the "epidermal racial schema," that is imposed from without to forge an alternative sense of self, an image that unfixes itself to usurp the beholder.

These embodied practices of image making reflect and refract the White colonial gaze in a truly dialectical relationship that resists binaristic views of pure resistance and totalizing objectification. Stephanie Leigh Batiste notes that "what is signified by notions of 'other' and 'self,' theoretical and material locations central to post-colonial studies, becomes unstable as the conditions of nation and race force complicated and conflicting allegiances across both categories."[23] She looks to performances as "darkening mirrors" that unravel the conceptual entrapping of "other/self" in their "creations, reflections, projections, desires, and protests

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[22] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 91.

[23] Stephanie Leigh Batiste, *Darkening Mirrors: Imperial Representation in Depression-Era African American Performance*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), xiv.

that signal the texture of the subjects' racial, cultural, and national visions of self."[24] Felice D. Blake also contributes to these conceptual unravelings by examining how Black writers "demonstrate a certain intentional and strategic indifference to the White gaze."[25] Black authors use expressive culture "to forge textual and ideological critiques of White supremacy" as well as to create their own crucial public spheres for imagining the radical possibilities for Black life.[26] Following Blake's investments in analyzing Black literature on its own terms, this project understands the aesthetic strategies of artists and authors of color not simply as responses or reactions to the ways in which White supremacy and colonialism shape citizenship. Even as they offer an ideological critique of these systems of racial inequality, the forms of artistic expression do cultural work in their own right.

Racialized ways of seeing continue to shape daily and spectacular encounters with citizenship, yet authors and artists of color redirect its hegemonic gaze to redraw our ways of seeing citizenship in creative ways. If national communities "are to be distinguished, not by their falsity/genuineness, but by the style in which they are imagined," as Anderson contends, then these artists stylize their aesthetics to reconstruct ways of seeing and being in relation to national and racial schemas.[27] The multiethnic US authors this project examines collage recognizable artifacts from visual culture—including but not limited to drawing and illustration, photography, and cartooning—to make visible the racialized field of vision that shapes citizenship and to articulate alternative assemblages of identity formation and political

[24] Batiste, *Darkening Mirrors*, xiv.

[25] Felice D. Blake, *Black Love, Black Hate: Intimate Antagonisms in African American Literature* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 2018), 6-7.

[26] Blake, *Black Love, Black Hate*, 7.

[27] Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, 6.

belonging. By *staging seeing* as an aesthetic strategy, these multimedia works blend the literary, visual, and performative arts to envision a coming together on the page that rejects unity, an ideal that is often coercively imposed in the US by those in power, and embrace moments of disjuncture, the fractured places where citizenship's contradictions and limitations reveal themselves. My use of staging evokes how "the visual sphere is a performative field where seeing race is not a transparent act; it is," as Nicole R. Fleetwood maintains, "itself a 'doing,'"[28] The multimedia stagings this project explores also invokes Prathama Banerjee's "staging the people," an aesthetic and political mode that relies on assemblages and artifices to make people "both thinkable and palpable as an entity" in political terms.[29] Staging seeing as a description is an aesthetic strategy and a reading practice that addresses how the assemblages and artifices of visual poetics and multimedia aesthetics disarticulate and reassemble the very category of citizen and its attendant contradictions for people of color within the US.

Substantive Citizenship and the Substance of Visual Form

The aesthetics of visual form provide an entry point for unraveling what Evelyn Nakano Glenn, drawing from T. H. Marshall, describes as the tensions between formal and substantive citizenship.[30] To clarify, formal citizenship refers to legal status, whereas substantive citizenship refers to the lived experience and social realities. As Nakano Glenn

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[28] Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2011), 7.

[29] Prathama Banerjee, *Elementary Aspects of the Political: Histories from the Global South* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 18-19.

[30] In *Citizenship and Social Class and Other Essays*, Marshall challenges citizenship as a unitary status by breaking it up into civil, political, and social citizenship. He argues that that civil and political rights become meaningless without social citizenship. See T. H. Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, edited by Tom Bottomore, (London: Pluto Press, 1992), 36.

makes clear, "citizenship is not just a matter of formal legal status; it is a matter of *belonging*, which requires *recognition* by other members of the community."[31] Nakano Glenn's analysis draws out how citizenship is more than a category of official state recognition but includes a variety of quotidian and collective forms of recognition. Substantive citizenship emphasizes the embodied substance of belonging, the ways in which being seen as a citizen is experienced day-to-day basis, such as when out bird watching in a public park, when driving in a car, when walking along the street, when entering one's own home. In short, it underscores the way that citizenship is experienced not only in name but in practice (both de jure and de facto) and through communitarian relationships. Nakano Glenn urges readers to "be attentive to the difference between having rights in theory and being able to exercise rights in practice," as she introduces that crucial form of belonging that is "substantive citizenship."[32] Disarticulating these varieties of experienced and felt citizenship challenges the claim that it is a unifying category or stable, static status. In so doing, attending to the substance of citizenship shifts belonging away from the over-determined and inevitably exclusionary category of citizenship and toward a more capacious understanding of political community and belonging.[33]

Extending these discussions of substantive citizenship by bringing them to bear on the study of visual culture and literature, my work asks: How does visual form comment on the substance of citizenship? How do forms of vision and visuality contour the lived textures of

[31] Evelyn Nakano Glenn, "Constructing Citizenship: Exclusion, Subordination, and Resistance," *American Sociological Review* 76, no. 1 (2011): 3; *emphasis* original, https://doi.org/10.1177/0003122411398443.

[32] Nakano Glenn, "Constructing Citizenship," 3.

[33] Marshall argues that "citizenship is itself becoming the architect of social inequality." Marshall, *Citizenship and Social Class*, 36.

citizenship and belonging, national, political, and otherwise? These questions ground and focus a methodology of reading form that is attentive to the social and political power dynamics that shape aesthetics. This revitalized and repoliticized attention to form has been variously figured as an "new formalism/activist formalism" by Marjorie Levinson, "racial form" by Colleen Lye, and "queer form" by Amin, Musser, and Peréz.[34] Rather than reducing literature into increasingly narrow taxonomies of control, this revitalized attention to aesthetic form opens to the multiplicitous, multi-sensory, and multimedia ways that literature works on readers to mediate power.

Following W. J. T. Mitchell's call in "Showing Seeing," this project understands that "a dialectical concept of visual culture cannot rest content with a definition of its object as the social construction of the visual field, but must insist on exploring the chiastic reversal of this proposition, *the visual construction of the social field.*"[35] Social formations and literary forms are shaped by seeing and being seen. This project interrogates the visual construction of the social field of citizenship by examining the ways that multiethnic American authors engage and transform this field through a series of formal visual tactics that simultaneously employ and rewrite the visual grammars of citizenship. For example, visual citations—such as the iconic hoodie that appears on the cover of Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) as a metonym for anti-Black state-sanctioned violence or the Bureau of Indian Affairs blood quantum charts that Deborah Miranda (Esselen and Chumash) remixes into

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[34] See Marjorie Levinson, "What is New Formalism?" *PMLA* 122, no. 2 (2007): 559; Colleen Lye, *America's Asia: Racial Form and American Literature, 1893-1945* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005); Colleen Lye, "Racial Form," *Representations* 104, no. 1 (2008); and Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez, "Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social," *ASAP/Journal* 2, no. 2 (2017).

[35] W. J. T. Mitchell, "Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2002): 171; emphasis original.

satirical art in her *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013)—recontextualize the social violence and the cultural work of these images. These texts' strategic deployments of visual poetics reveal how acts of seeing, refusing to see, and being seen surveil citizenship. Their experiments with visual form ultimately disrupt the time and space of the text at crucial moments where citizenship is called into question. These interventions operate through what José Esteban Muñoz describes as a queer of color aesthetics of "disidentification": a strategy that neither opts for assimilation nor strict opposition, but instead uses the visual codes of power structures to work within and against them and their efforts to define and contain.[36] Through their disidentificatory visual poetics, performance, and play, the works I examine in this dissertation evoke the hegemonic gaze of citizenship in order to theorize political life-worlds within and beyond its restrictions.

My use of *visual form* bridges the aesthetic, social, and political dimensions of visuality. In addition to invoking to the formal structure and aesthetic details of visual culture, it also precipitates forms of seeing and perceiving to reveal the ways in which these calls to look are situated within social structures of power. Hal Foster distinguishes between vision, the physical operation of sight, and visuality, the social and historical construction of sight, while also recognizing their mutual imbrication.[37] As many "eye-witness" accounts underscore, there is no objective operation of sight that exists outside of the social.[38] At the

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[36] José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications: Queers of Color and the Performance of Politics* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11.

[37] Hal Foster, "Preface," in *Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture* No. 2, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Dia Art Foundation, 1988), ix.

[38] Mistaken eyewitness accounts are a leading cause of false convictions, yet the criminal (in)justice system continues to treat them as reliable and even desirable evidentiary accounts. For more on the failings of eyewitness accounts, see Thomas D. Albright, "Why Eyewitnesses Fail," *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences - PNAS* 114, no. 30 (2017): 7758–776 and Steve Chapman, "Injustice, in Plain Sight: The Trouble with Eyewitness Identifications," *Chicago Tribune,* Aug 28, 2011.

same time, the social construction of what we see and its symbolic value have embodied, psychic, and sometimes fatal consequences. While Foster recognizes these entanglements, he finds that "the difference between the terms signals a difference within the visual—between the mechanism of sight and its historical techniques, between the datum of vision and its discursive determinations—a difference, many differences, among how we see, how we are able, allowed, or made to see, and how we see this seeing or the unseen therein."[39] Visual form, then, embraces these multiple forms of seeing. Attending to difference within visual form begins to unravel the hegemonic scopic regimes of Western modernity that attempt to cohere and to hierarchize divergent ways of seeing into a singular narrative.[40]

Given the way that, in Berlant's words, "American citizenship has been profoundly organized around the distribution and coding of sensations," my emphasis on visuality and the multi-sensory ways that it announces itself attempts to reorganize how the sensations are distributed and coded within literary studies as well as narratives of national belonging.[41] This methodology of close reading and viewing aesthetic form employs "a sense of attentiveness that *allows difference in*," as Kyla Wazana Tompkins urges.[42] Tina M. Campt models a methodology for tracing and interpreting these visual coding of citizenship by uncovering the complex ways that identification photographs have been a means of both

[39] Foster, "Preface," ix. See also Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture* No. 2, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Dia Art Foundation, 1988).

[40] Foster, "Preface," ix. For more on scopic regimes of Western modernity see Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture* No. 2, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Dia Art Foundation, 1988), 3-23.

[41] Lauren Berlant, "The Queen of America Goes to Washington City: Harriet Jacobs, Frances Harper, Anita Hill," in Subjects *& Citizens: Nation, Race, and Gender from* Oroonoko *to Anita Hill*, ed. by Michael Moon and Cathy N. Davidson (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 460.

[42] Kyla Wazana Tompkins, "The Shush," *PMLA* 136, no. 3 (2021): 421.

state-sanctioned surveillance and quotidian acts of resistance for Black diasporic peoples. Examining "the unlikely interplay between the vernacular and the state" that takes place within these image, Campt crafts a methodology of what she calls "listening to images" that attends to this interplay to "[open] up the radical interpretive possibilities of images and state archives we are most often inclined to overlook."[43] Listening as a methodology asks viewers to attend to the ways in which images resonate beyond their intended representation, urging us to pay attention to their quiet announcements that might not easily fit into models of resistance/objectification or self/other. Informed by Campt's work, this project listens to images both within literature to trace the underground epistemologies, immanent futurities, and subtle gestures of resistance that that the interplay of word and image in multimedia literature enunciate on the page.

Methodologically, my project takes its cues from the mosaic strategies and collage forms of these multimedia works of literature, works that require listening. I juxtapose, collage, and interweave multiple literary traditions of the United States—specifically, Black, Indigenous, and Latinx literatures—to examine citizenship as a category that cuts across differently racialized communities while also attending to glimpses of coalitional affinities that exist within these distinct literary traditions and their visual poetics. Much of this project is grounded in an indebted to Black Studies perspectives that have theorized the gaze as a force of racialization. The project looks to Black Studies, not as a metaphorical or analogous framework that can be applied indiscriminately to describe the experiences of all people of color but rather as a crucial epistemology that is necessary for theorizing collective liberation. My analysis attends to specificity of different racial and national communities

[43] Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 5.

while drawing out how multiethnic US literature models multi-racial struggles and coalitions. These mosaic methodologies do not cohere difference, both within the racial communities and the national community I explore, into a singular image. Instead, they illuminate fracturing moments of disjuncture where the seams of citizenship and the sutures of coalition fail to hold. Examining intimate antagonisms and intraracial conflict within Black literature, Blake makes clear that "Treatments of difference within a community marked by racial difference should not be aimed at reconciling the group so much as challenging the epistemological terms on which such degradations of gender, sexuality, class, and ability depend. They should foster a clash of epistemologies and lead to new conceptions of being and being together."[44] *Visual Poetics, Racial Politics* traces the ways in which the visual imaginations and epistemologies of multiethnic US literature offer glimmering portals or glimpses into new conceptions of being and being together.

While the field of multiethnic literature has generally been marked by a comparativist approach, I employ what Juliet Hooker theorizes as a juxtapositional model of analysis that examines "moments of exchange or overlap" rather than assuming "an illusion of coherence and distinctness of the units being compared" that risks reinforcing the very categories it seeks to critique.[45] This juxtapositional mode emerges from the texts I have chosen to examine as their images speak to each other and invoke, at times, a collective visual imagination. For instance, the experience of (in)visibility emerges in some form across all of the works I examine, and the project is bookended by an invocation of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*. There are similarities between the way that Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* and

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[44] Blake, *Black Love, Black Hate*, 13.

[45] Juliet Hooker, *Theorizing Race in the Americas: Douglass, Sarmiento, Du Bois, and Vasconcelos* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2017), 11.

Deborah Miranda's *Bad Indians* punctuate their poetry and prose with photographic interludes. Like Miranda, Alberto Ledesma also critiques settler colonial narratives of manifest destiny by reappropriating its visual mythologies. Tracing the moments of exchange and overlap illuminates—pictures—the coalitional affinities that exist within these distinct literary traditions and their visual poetics as they navigate and circumvent the category of citizenship.

Chapter One, "Picturing & Punctuating Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: Seeing Citizenship from Below," analyzes Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* (1952) alongside the author's artistic collaboration, "A Man Becomes Invisible" (1952), with photographer Gordon Parks. Reading the two in tandem, I trace the novel's visual imagination to argue that (in)visibility is not a natural ontological state of Blackness but is rather a process of becoming that allows the novel's protagonist to occupy an underground, fugitive relationship to the nation. *Invisible Man*'s critique of the ways that (in)visibility contours Black American's experience of citizenship is best emblematized by Parks' photograph of the novel's protagonist illuminated underground. While *Invisible Man* precedes the other works in my project by a half-century and is not necessarily a multimedia work, I begin with this canonical text and its relationship to visual media to theorize the epistemological and temporal implications of visuality that conceptually ground the more contemporary works the project goes on to engage.

Chapter Two, "Looking Back to Black Feminist Futures: Staging the Oppositional Gaze in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*," explores Black feminist reorientations of the (in)visibility that Ellison and Parks reveal. I examine how Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric* (2014) uses intertextual references to visual

art to connect intimate experiences of anti-Black racism to longer histories and a structural critique. Highlighting how embodied experiences of citizenship are shaped by serial visual encounters, Rankine's visual poetics rehearses moments of misrecognition, both quotidian and spectacular, to invite her reader into what bell hooks' names as an "oppositional gaze." Both Ellison and Rankine explore how the double-edged paradox of (in)visibility recasts Black Americans' experience citizenship while modeling different political frameworks to negotiate the dream deferred.[46]

After grounding my work through Black literary and visual cultures, the second half of the project traces the interconnections of racism, colonialism, and global capitalism while attending in tandem to glimmers of cross-racial solidarities. **Chapter Three, "'We can be whole—just differently': Mapping Deborah Miranda's Mosaic Forms,"** attends to the colonial histories and legacies of federal frameworks of recognition, including citizenship and blood quantum, and the ways that they get mapped onto land and people. Chumash and Ohlone Costanoan Esselen author Deborah Miranda's *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (2013), like Rankine's *Citizen*, integrates image into her poetry and prose to disrupt the time and space of the page. *Bad Indians* dives into the detritus of national and colonial archives to reorganize their fragments into a multimedia mosaic, a counternarrative to the visual mythology (or hagiography) of the Spanish mission system and the iterations of Mexican and US settler colonialism that followed it. Through these mosaic methodologies, Miranda's work reveals the colonial legacies of US citizenship and remaps the temporalities,

[46] I invoke Langston Hughes' poem "Harlem," which also recognizes the explosive potential of (in)visibility when it asks, "What happens to a dream deferred?" Langston Hughes, "Harlem," *Poetry Foundation*, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/46548/harlem.

geographies, and visual cultures that shape it to imagine the contemporary realities and future histories of California's Indigenous peoples.

Chapter Four, "Redrawing National Borders of Belonging in Latinx Comics," continues this exploration of the colonial and racialized geographies that construct the category of citizen, often through criminalizing discourses and images. In it, I examine an archive of Latinx single-panel comics that emerge from the editorial cartoon tradition. I read Eric J. García's anti-racist, anti-imperialist, and anti-capitalist political cartoons, written under the banner of *El Machete Illustrated* and collected in *Drawing on Anger: Portraits of US Hypocrisy* (2018), alongside Alberto Ledesma's mixed-media memoir *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer: Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life* (2017). These artists use the comics border, or panel, to critique the violence of the US-Mexico border, a symbolic and material infrastructure around which national anxieties and imaginations of citizenship cohere. In an emblematic distillation of word and image, the single-panel comic, these discourses are heightened and reorganized to portray citizenship's embodied and epistemological stakes and to invite their viewers into new ways of seeing national borders of belonging.

Visual Poetics, Racial Politics excavates a corpus of twentieth- and twenty-first-century works that employ an array of visual poetics—from shifts in typography and punctuated excess, to the overt inclusion of visual art, to the use the comics form—to reveal literature's larger visual imagination. While the focal texts of *Visual Poetics, Racial Politics* are situated in and organized by difference, located in differently racialized communities and literary traditions, these innovative works of literature are united in their turn to the visual to illustrate the contradictions of citizenship. "Seeing Citizenship," as the subtitle of this work

calls us to do, attends to the social, substantive experiences of the vexed category of citizenship, as it is shaped by visuality and visual cultures. This work is an invitation to listen to the images within multiethnic US literatures, to hear and to uncover alternative registers of recognition and visions of belonging.

Chapter One

Picturing & Punctuating Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: Seeing Citizenship from Below

"From the moment of its unexpected inception this has been a most self-willed and self-generating piece of fiction. For at a time when I was struggling with a quite different narrative it announced itself in what were to become the opening words of its prologue, moved in, and proceeded to challenge my imagination for some seven years. What is more, despite its peacetime scenery it erupted out of what had been conceived as a war novel."[47]

-Ralph Ellison, 1981 "Introduction" to *Invisible Man*

"I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allan Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me."[48]

-Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man*

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In his 1981 introduction, written to commemorate the thirtieth publication anniversary of *Invisible Man,* Ralph Ellison says of the work, "from the moment of its unexpected inception this has been a most self-willed and self-generating piece of fiction."[49] He was working on another piece entirely, a World War II novel, when something or someone persistently interrupted his attempts, a demanding voice that asked to be put to page. Ellison describes this intrusion as being "upstaged by the voice which spoke so knowingly of invisibility."[50] This persistent voice belongs to Ellison's unnamed protagonist, referred to as Invisible Man, who episodically grapples with the overdetermined (in)visibility of being Black in the United States during the height of Jim Crow. Invisible Man attempts to get out from under the

[47] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1995), vii.

[48] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 3.

[49] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, vii.

[50] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, xi.

oppressive regime of Jim Crow first by following a Booker T. Washington-like figure and striving for racial uplift through education and later by joining an interracial communist organization called "The Brotherhood." By the end of the novel, Invisible Man, running from a street mob, falls into an abandoned basement of a Harlem apartment building where he decides to stay underground and write his own novel to make sense of his (in)visibility.

Interestingly, the impetus of Ellison's novel, which is so concerned with visibility, is not visual but vocal: a voice that erupts, interrupts, and insists: "I am an invisible man."[51] The senses, voice and visuality most notably, are inextricably linked in Ellison's meditation on Black (in)visibility. In this chapter, I trace how *Invisible Man* strategically employs moments of punctuated excess to critique how Black Americans are fundamentally estranged from citizenship and the ways in which this exclusion hinges on visual practices. These punctuated moments visually mark an interruption in the vocal and temporal linearity of the novel, creating a polyphonic critique of Invisible Man's experiences with anti-Black racism. These temporal and epistemological interruptions challenge the notion of vision as evidence and reveal how looking is invested in power. Throughout, the chapter I highlight vision as a situated epistemological standpoint to think beyond the binary of Black (in)visibility. I use parentheticals around (in)visibility in my own writing for several reasons. First, the use of parentheticals speaks to what Leigh Raiford recognizes as the simultaneity of "(cultural) visibility and (political) invisibility."[52] Second, it reveals (in)visibility as a process of being in, or within, social and political structures of seeing, or visual regimes, not a naturalized state. Finally, it playfully performs the parenthetical aesthetics and politics that pervade

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[51] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 3.

[52] Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 7.

Ellison's text.[53] Throughout *Invisible Man*, parenthetical remarks syntactically perform a critical, often ironic, defamiliarization—a grammatical form of critique, a way of visually marking a double-ness and a double-edgedness that restructures how the novel asks readers to see Invisible Man and his epistemological, visual, and political perspective.

Ellison's *Invisible Man* does not merely describe the violence of (in)visibility: It argues that, through this mode of seeing and being seen gives, Black Americans develop a subversive epistemological position, a visual heuristic that restructures time and space. I analyze visual tropes and gestures in Ellison's novel alongside Gordon Parks' photographic collaboration with Ellison, "A Man Becomes Invisible," published in *Life* magazine in 1952 to explicate the novel's visual imagination, one that has persisted in popular visual and print culture since the novel's original publication. Both Ellison and Parks understood the visual as a powerful weapon in both maintaining and resisting entrenched images of Black Americans. After exploring the political implications of the visual sphere and the visual imaginaries that respond to it, the second half of the chapter unravels the complexities and contradictions of (in)visibility in the novel by reading the moments of punctuated excess, ambivalent ellipses and parenthetical interruptions, in the novel. This chapter reads visual excess to trace the epistemologies and temporalities of (in)visibility to think with and learn from that willful voice that announced itself to Ellison, drawing on Sara Ahmed's recognition of willfulness as "a diagnosis of the failure to comply with those whose authority is given" and a useful political mode of disobedience.[54] How might an attention to the visual elements and

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[53] This playful use of parentheticals is also inspired by Jennifer DeVere Brody's foundational work and syntactical experimentation in *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play*. Jennifer DeVere Brody, *Punctuation: Art, Politics, and Play* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008).

[54] Sara Ahmed, *Willful Subjects* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 3.

imaginaries of this novel redirect and circumvent the optics of anti-Blackness? How do these subversive ways of seeing reckon with and reorganize racialized formations of time? How does the novel and its visual imagination map out ulterior and anterior relationships to citizenship and the nation? What practices and paces of seeing and reading are required to linger in this underground space of Black (in)visibility? While attention to visuality in Ellison's *Invisible Man* might seem overdetermined, I argue that attention the visual poetics and imaginations of the text house radical temporalities and epistemologies that, in fact, challenge racialized readings that collapse Blackness and (in)visibility. I look to visual tropes and typographies in Invisible Man to uncover the text's oppositional optics, to reveal the insurgent ways that it uses visual strategies to convey plural temporalities that put the music of (in)visibility on the page.

(In)Visibility& Estranged Citizenship

The category of citizen has always posed a contradiction for Black Americans, who, as Ellison traces, have been a part of "the grueling and continuing fight for full citizenship since Emancipation."[55] Rebecca Wanzo, explores the historical origins of this fight for citizenship, arguing: "The origins of African American citizenship are infamously partial (three-fifths a person) and formally nonexistent, a foundation of both 'counting' and *not* that inaugurates a definitional crisis in a national discourse characterized by contradictions."[56] In a calculated

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[55] Ralph Ellison, *Shadow and Act* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 25.

[56] Rebecca Wanzo, *The Content of Our Caricature: African American Comic Art and Political Belonging* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 76; emphasis original. Wanzo refers to the "three fifths compromise," language in the US Constitution that declared enslaved people as three fifths a person. While the language of "slave" and "slavery" are conveniently never mentioned in this clause or the constitution at all, the US constitution, which is often heralded as a the Ur text of American democratic ideals, further solidified the political power of the plantation class, the institution of slavery, and the ideological framework of White supremacy by limiting the privileges and protections of "democracy" to an exclusive class of White, land-owning, educated men.

effort to maintain the system of slavery and racial capitalism upon which the nation was built, American citizenship was fundamentally defined by and through Whiteness until the Fourteenth Amendment expanded the boundaries of citizenship to include birthright citizenship, and thereby Black Americans, in 1889. Even then, the protections and privileges of citizenship were often true in name only. Salamishah Tillet identifies "African Americans' formal possession of full legal citizenship and their inherited burden of 'civic estrangement'" as one of the fundamental paradoxes of post-Civil Rights American politics.[57]The tension between the legal possession of citizenship and the lived experience of estrangement is evocative of the conflict between formal and substantive citizenship that I set out in the introduction to this project. "In the case of African Americans," Tillet describes, "civic estrangement occurs because they have been marginalized or underrepresented in the civic myths, monuments, narratives, icons, creeds, and images of the past that constitute, reproduce, and promote an American national identity."[58] Tillet's coinage and conceptualization of "civic estrangement" names the contradictions between formal and substantive citizenship, or *de jure* and *de facto* citizenship, unique to Black Americans and illustrates how this sense of estrangement is an effect not only of legal discourses but also of the literary, visual, and popular cultures that constitute and reproduce American national identity and belonging. In his essay "Twentieth-Century Fiction and the Black Mask of Humanity," Ellison describes this estrangement as "the enforced alienation which constantly knifes into our natural identification with our country."[59] Ellison's *Invisible Man* explores

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[57] Salamishah Tillet, *Sites of Slavery: Citizenship and Racial Democracy in the Post-Civil Rights Imagination* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 3.

[58] Tillet, *Sites of Slavery*, 3.

[59] Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 25.

how this state of enforced alienation is compelled through visual discourses or, in other words, the way that visibility is a litmus for citizenship. While this estrangement or (in)visibility is "sometimes advantageous," Invisible Man recognizes that it "is most often rather wearing on the nerves."[60] Invisibility for Ellison and his protagonist then is both an impetus for state-sanctioned violence—ranging from exploitation to eviction to police brutality and murder—and a means of advantageous antagonism to the nation state.

Many of these civic or national myths are created through a dialogic relationship with what Michele Wallace calls "the myth of blackness," the notion that Blackness "is the opposite of whiteness, or it is so much 'the same' that it is invisible."[61] This mythology reduces Blackness to an "inevitable and structural binary opposition," to which (in)visibility is the only response.[62] Recalling Frantz Fanon's description of being "overdetermined from the outside" by the White colonial gaze, this process of invisiblizing is always already a process of rendering Blackness hypervisible to create a knowable, legible subject of colonial control—a process that, to be clear, is never totalizing in its effects.[63] (In)visibility, then, is not a natural precondition of Blackness but is rather a problem of seeing, a result of how visual discourses are constructed by and thus construct racial ideology. Invisible Man, recognizing these visual power dynamics, locates his own "invisibility" as a problem of seeing, "a matter of the construction of their inner eyes, those eyes with which they look through their physical eyes upon reality."[64] Invisible Man's comment anticipates the

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[60] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 3.

[61] Michele Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 370.

[62] Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*, 370.

[63] Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 95.

[64] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 3.

distinction between vision and visuality that Visual Studies would not establish until later by distinguishing between "their inner eyes," the social and historical construction of visuality, from "their physical eyes," or the biological function of vision. Seeing is always constructed by a social and political field of visuality, or, as Nicole R. Fleetwood contends: "*seeing black is always a problem in a visual field that structures the troubling presence of blackness*."[65]

This exclusionary way of seeing—and it is a mode of seeing even as it attempts to disappear the perceived "object" of its vision—is not accidental. It is a militant, aggressive willingness to not see, a refusal to recognize Black subjectivity.[66] Charles W. Mills theorizes refusal to see as one of the tactics of White Americans' "epistemology of ignorance" that is not benign but is, in fact, "militant and aggressive" in the way that it poses as knowledge to protect and maintain White supremacy.[67] Ellison himself critiques this oxymoronic refusal to see as:

> [The] pseudoscientific sociological concept which held that most Afro-American difficulties sprang from [their] "high visibility"; a phrase as double dealing and insidious as its more recent oxymoronic cousins, "benign neglect" and "reverse discrimination," both of which translate to "Keep those Negroes running—but in their same old place."[68]

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[65] Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 12.

[66] I draw here from Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith, who *Matter* define "epistemology of ignorance" as "a militant, aggressive willingness to not know." Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith, *Stay Woke: A People's Guide to Making All Black Lives Matter* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 75.

[67] See Charles W. Mills, "White Ignorance," in *Race and Epistemologies of Ignorance*, ed. by Shannon Sullivan and Nancy Tuana (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 2007), 13; and Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1997), 18. In a telling moment in *Invisible Man,* the protagonist points out how knowledge gets wielded to uphold racial ideologies and to bar citizenship, saying: "White folks seemed always to expect you to know those things which they'd done everything they could think of to prevent you from knowing. The thing to do was to be prepared—as my grandfather had been when it was demanded that he quote the entire United States Constitution as a test of his fitness to vote. He had confounded them all by passing the test, although they still refused him the ballot." Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 315.

[68] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, xv.

Importantly, the very mode of seeing (or rather refusing to see) that Ellison critiques in his 1952 novel is the foundation of more contemporary adaptations of so-called colorblind racism, which I discuss in Chapter Two. Hortense J. Spillers contends that *Invisible Man* redirects these hegemonic mythologies, calling the text "a literary countermyth of good intentions" that, "through a complicated scheme of conceptual images," explores the historical and ethical implications of Black disobedience, or the Black underground.[69] In its deconstruction of national mythologies of Blackness, *Invisible Man* reconstructs a new mythos and ethos of (in)visibility, not as a natural or ontological state but as a revolutionary epistemological perspective. Even as Fanon recognizes the realities of what he calls the "racial epidermal schema," he maintains that "black consciousness is immanent in itself. I am not the potentiality of something; I am fully what I am."[70] Invisible Man, understanding the social construction of the racialized gaze, reverses and refracts it to declare himself as the author and subject of his own narrative. He embraces his status of (in)visibility, not as something that is imposed on to him from the outside, but a subversive, immanent consciousness that emerges from his spatiotemporal and corporeal state of being. His name abbreviated, IM, as it often is in literary criticism, sonically sounds the wholeness of his subjectivity—I Am: a divine declaration of self-imaging. Underscoring Invisible Man's subjectivity, Régis Michel declares that "the novel starts with I. It is written in first person, where I comes before all the rest, even before the fact of being invisible (although he is only

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[69] Hortense J. Spillers, *Black, White, and In Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003), 68 & 69. Bringing the mythic capacities of literature into a wider realm of popular representation, Stuart Hall claims popular culture as a "profoundly mythic" arena "where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves, where we are imagined, where we are represented, not only to the audiences out there who do not get the message, but to ourselves for the first time." Stuart Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" in *Black Popular Culture*, a project by Michele Wallace ed. by Gina Dent (New York: Bay Press, 1983), 32.

[70] Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 114.

invisible to the eyes of others). The text is clear: This man is first a subject (of language) before he becomes an object (of vision—or non vision)."[71]

While Tillet positions civic estrangement as an affective and political mode that emerges in the post-Civil Rights moment, she recognizes how its aesthetics often return to the past, specifically the antebellum period, to "shuttl[e] between the pessimism of civic estrangement and the privilege of African American legal citizenship."[72] *Invisible Man* occupies a unique temporal and cultural position from which to shuttle between the contradictions of citizenship that Black Americans have historically and continue to face. Published in 1952 just two years before *Brown versus Board of Education* and three years before the Montgomery Bus Boycott, the novel is situated in a mid-century moment between World War II and the Civil Right Movement that Ellison himself described as fundamentally paradoxical. He explores this post-WWII crisis of citizenship as "an archetypical American dilemma," asking: "How could you treat a Negro as equal in war and then deny him equality during times of peace?"[73] *Invisible Man* grapples with these contradictions to posit (in)visibility not simply as a matter of political exclusion but as an underground positionality that informs political praxis. Describing this relationship, Wallace maintains that "Invisibility, a visual metaphor, is then employed as a way of presenting a variety of responses to racism and cultural apartheid."[74] Through a series of visual tropes, metaphors,

[71] Régis Michel, "White Negro: jeff Wall's Uncle Tom: On the Obscenity of Photopantomime," *Oxford Art Journal* 30, no. 1 (2007): 55. 55-68.

[72] Tillet, *Sites of Slavery*, 4.

[73] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, xiii.

[74] Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*, 370.

and gestures, Ellison's *Invisible Man* theorizes a variety of political responses to seeing both Blackness and citizenship beyond stock images and national mythologies.

Picturing an Invisible Man

The image of Invisible Man underground illuminated by an orchestra of lightbulbs has electrified visual artists and ignited a series of photographic representations of the novel. The most canonical of which is Gordon Parks' photographic collaboration with Ellison, "A Man Becomes Invisible," which first appeared in *LIFE* magazine's August 25, 1952, issue shortly after the publication of the novel. Ellison and Parks met in Harlem in 1946 not long after Ellison began working on *Invisible Man*, and the two worked together on a collaboration for an earlier photographic essay titled "Harlem is Nowhere" (1948), which was published in *'48: The Magazine of the Year*.[75] Parks was a celebrated photographer and the first Black photographer hired by *Life* magazine. Both Parks and Ellison, according to Michal Raz-Russo, shared a "vision of racial injustices, coupled with a shared belief in the communicative power of photography" to express the plurality and paradoxes of Black life in postwar America to a wide audience.[76] Raiford notes a similar democratic impulse in the use of photography in struggles for Black freedom, arguing that Black artists and activists used

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[75] This was how Ellison's essay "Harlem Is Nowhere," which has since been collected in *Shadow and Act*, first appeared, which reveals the generative interconnections between literature and popular visual and print culture.

[76] Michal Raz-Russo, "Visible Men," in *Invisible Man: Gordon Parks and Ralph Ellison in Harlem* (Chicago: Steidl/The Gordon Parks Foundation and The Art Institute of Chicago, 2017), 13. Lena M. Hill describes Ellison as a photographer in his own right who "nurtured his own growing interest in photography, and specifically portraiture, staring at Harlem dwellers from behind his camera lens." Lena M. Hill, "The Visual Art of *Invisible Man*: Ellison's Portrait of Blackness," *American Literature* 81, no. 4 (December 2009): 788-789. Sara Blair also argues that "Ellison's negotiations of racial history and experience in *Invisible Man* owe an as-yet unacknowledged debt to another cultural form with which he purposively experimented: photography." Sara Blair, "Ellison, photography, and the origins of invisibility," in *The Cambridge Companion to Ralph Ellison,* ed. by Ross Posnock (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 56.

photography's visual idioms and framing devices to throw the experience of (in)visibility into sharp relief:[77]

> Photography could be used to challenge dominant representations of African Americans as ignorant, poor, and unfit for citizenship and simultaneously be used to visually assert an image of worth, dignity, and self-possession. [. . .] Photography then, offered activists a seemingly democratic and versatile medium through which they could visually reference, reframe, or reject dominant political categories [. . .] to recast the meaning of black identity and national belonging and illuminat[e] the contradictions of racial ideology.[78]

Within the history of Black aesthetics and social movements then, photography has been a locus where the visual grammars of citizenship are contested and rewritten.[79] Black artists and activist took the very lens that had been used to create and circulate stereotypical images of Blackness and used its democratic appeal and formal versatility in the struggle against White supremacy.[80] Black artists and activists used photography as a canvas of representation through which they not only contested racist ideologies but also recast Black identity and its relationship to national belonging.[81]

While Parks' photographs are inspired by Ellison's fiction and are themselves fictional, or staged, they take on a documentary element that was common throughout Parks' work. Likewise, by the time Ellison began working on "Harlem is Nowhere" with Parks, Ellison had already been living in Harlem for a decade; lived knowledge of the city seeped

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[77] Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare*, 7.

[78] Raiford, *Imprisoned in a Luminous Glare*, 9.

[79] bell hooks also argues that "The history of black liberation movements in the United States could be characterized as a struggle over images as much as it had also been a struggle for rights, for equal access." bell hooks, *Art on My Mind: Visual Politics* (New York: New Press, 1995), 57.

[80] I explore the colonial history of the camera as a tool of racialization, colonialism, and national exclusion more in Chapter Three.

[81] Here, I invoke Stuart Hall's work regarding how Black people "have used the body—as if it was, and it often was, the only cultural capital we had. We have worked on ourselves as the canvases of representation." Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" 27.

into *Invisible Man.*[82] Throughout their collaborations, Ellison and Parks treated Harlem as more than a mere pictorial opportunity; they viewed it as a lab and a labyrinth of the underground, where every-day Black people were creatively forging identity, politics, and aesthetics in response to their social and material conditions. As Jean-Christophe Cloutier describes, "Ellison and Parks turned to photography not simply to provide a documentary record of the 'reality' of the 'Negro problem,' but moreover to capture the 'sense of unreality that haunts Harlem as it haunts the world.'"[83] The photographic adaptation of *Invisible Man*, "A Man Becomes Invisible," picks up where their previous work in "Harlem is Nowhere" left off, returning to Harlem's haunting locales to visually depict Ellison's surreal portrayal of American race relations. In its original publication, it spans three pages, featuring four black and white photographs that are framed by an introduction and captions. Somewhat ironically, the feature, which centers the novel's Black protagonist and the work of two Black artists, stands out in an issue that is otherwise overwhelmed by images of Whiteness that are also wrapped up in images of idealized femininity, the so-called "traditional family," consumerism, and the cold-war politics that marked mid-century America.[84] Awash in a this

[82] See Jean-Christophe Cloutier, "Harlem is Now Here," in *Invisible Man: Gordon Parks and Ralph Ellison in Harlem* (Chicago: Steidl/The Gordon Parks Foundation and The Art Institute of Chicago, 2017), 31. According to Cloutier, the 1943 Harlem riot, which Ellison covered for the *New York Post*, left a particular impact on the author and is said to inspire his depiction of the riot at the end of *Invisible Man*.

[83] Cloutier, "Harlem is Now Here," 30. Here Cloutier cites Wrights' introduction to St. Clair Drake and Horace Cayton's *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* in which he evokes W. E. B. Du Bois's provocation, "How does it feel to be a problem?," as well as Ellison's own words on the back cover of *'48: The Magazine of the Year*. See Richard Wright, "Introduction," in *Black Metropolis: A Study of Negro Life in a Northern City* by St. Clair Drake and Horace Clayton (New York: Harcourt, 1970), xxv; and W. E. B. Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folk* (New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1994), 1.

[84] The cover, for instance, features a young White woman in a white turtleneck smiling up at the camera and modeling "College Fashions: Turtleneck Sweater." The page opposite the title page of "A Man Becomes Invisible" features a full-page advertisement for Richard Thorpe's film adaptation of Sir Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, a historical fiction novel that participates in the making of a White Anglo-Saxon identity, mythology, history, and literary canon.

sea of Whiteness, Ellison and Parks' story of how "a man becomes invisible" becomes hypervisible in a prescient staging of the visual politics it critiques. The perceived (in)visibility of Blackness is in dialogic relationship with the overrepresentation of Whiteness within American popular culture and consciousness. The title of the work underscores how (in)visibility, which is often framed as a race problem, is actually a social and political problem. (In)visibility, the title contends, is a process of becoming, not a natural state, a process that can lead to estrangement from the body politic and/or to the politicized consciousness of the underground.

The introduction to the photographic series describes the collaborative project, saying: "*LIFE* Photographer Gordon Parks, a friend of Author Ellison, was so moved by this story that he translated it into pictures. With Ellison's help he re-created from the novel the scenes on these pages to show the loneliness, the horror and the disillusionment of a man who has lost faith in himself and his world."[85] The first image portrays Invisible Man emerging from the manhole he fell into at the end of the novel and looking over his shoulder. The way he looks out—as if on the lookout, surveilling the scene and ensuring his safety above ground—anticipates action, one that is only alluded to in the novel's Prologue and Epilogue (see Fig. 3).

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[85] Ralph Ellison and Gordon Parks, "A Man Becomes Invisible," in *Life*, August 25, 1952, 9.

Figure 3. Invisible Man emerging from the manhole. Gordon Parks, *The Invisible Man*, Harlem, New York, 1952. Image courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation.

The titular photograph takes up two-thirds of the large page below it the series title and byline announces: "A MAN BECOMES INVISIBLE: Photographer re-creates the emotional crises of a powerful new novel."[86] While the photographs recreate the "emotional crises" of the novel, Parks does not merely "translate" that affective state into pictures. The photographs work beyond illustration, translation, or adaptation. It stages and reimagines the political possibilities of the text. The titular photograph, for example, exists ambiguously within the context of the novel. As Matthew S. Witkovsky points out the titular photograph does not directly borrow from the Prologue but adapts it: "Ellison's narrator falls into self-discovery because a manhole cover is missing, and at the end of the novel he only announces

[86] Ellison and Parks, "A Man Becomes Invisible," 9.

his intention to end the underground 'hibernation' and 'come up for breath'; actual reemergence must take place after the story has finished."[87] Parks' titular photograph then is a prescient portrayal, a prophetic prediction of what occurs beyond the pages of the novel when Invisible Man emerges from underground, as he knows he must when he declares, "Thus, having tried to give pattern to the chaos which lives withing the pattern of your certainties. I must come out, I must emerge." [88]

A photograph on the second page of the series, one that does depict a scene from the novel, explores the novel's politics through the metaphor of vision—not the underground politics that Invisible Man finds by falling into the manhole but the White liberal politics of the Brotherhood. In the novel, the Brotherhood is a communist organization that Invisible Man becomes involved in after delivering a powerful speech on the steps of a Harlem apartment building where he calls out the racist violence of both landlords and police. While the Brotherhood prides itself on being a racially progressive and integrated organization, it advocates a version of "Brotherhood" that positions class as the most important locus of politics in ways that perpetuate a colorblind elision of racism, both within the organization and society at large. In contrast to the Brotherhood, Ras the Exhorter (later referred to as Ras the Destroyer) offers Invisible Man another model of organizing that is race conscious: "We organize—organization is good—but we organize black. BLACK!"[89] Ras's vision of Black liberation, however, is one that centers Black men, often a single charismatic leader, as

[87] Matthew S. Witkovsky, "Introduction," in *Invisible Man: Gordon Parks and Ralph Ellison in Harlem* (Chicago: Steidl/The Gordon Parks Foundation and The Art Institute of Chicago, 2017), 10.

[88] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 581.

[89] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 373.

political subjects to the exclusion of Black women.[90] Wallace points out that Black women are largely absent from the novel's political imagination if not the book altogether:

> In *Invisible Man*, women are generally white, and while the text is not especially sympathetic or kind to white women, it seems entirely engaged by the assumption that from a white male progressive point of view, or from the perspective of Euro-American modernism (I am not suggesting that these are necessarily synonyms), the problem of the female (white) other and the problem of the black (male) other are easily interchangeable.[91]

This elision, which plagues the novel even as it critiques the Brotherhood's inability to perceive the particularities of race, renders Black women's experiences unrepresentable and outside the realm of political action, even as Black women were and are leaders in collective struggles for Black liberation. Black women experience a distinct and heightened (in)visibility that is informed by their race and gender together—two social locations that, while not interchangeable, intersect. If we understand (in)visibility not only as a tool of social objectification and exclusion but also as a locus of knowledge and political praxis, then the experiences of Black women are a fundamental piece of the conceptual struggle for Black liberation that Ellison chooses not to illuminate in his work.

When Invisible Man calls out the Brotherhood's racism after Tod Clifton, a former member of the organization, is shot by police, Brother Jack, the organization's leader, refuses to listen, insisting that Invisible Man simply cannot understand the organization's strategy because he does not have "the long view and the short view and the over-all view mastered."[92] In this rhythmic metaphor, Brother Jack understands the political through the

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[90] I draw from Erica R. Edwards critique of "charisma as an animating fiction of contemporary black politics." Erica R. Edwards, *Charisma and the Fictions of Black Leadership* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), x.

[91] Wallace, *Dark Designs and Visual Culture*, 370.

[92] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 470.

mastery of vision. Later, this metaphor becomes grotesquely literal when Brother Jack becomes so agitated that his glass eye "erupt[s] out of his face" and into his glass of water.[93]

Figure 4. Brother Jack's glass eye grotesquely stares out at the viewer from a glass of water. Gordon Parks, *Brotherhood Sacrifice*, Harlem, New York, 1952. Image courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation.

Parks' photograph shows Brother Jack's glass eye staring out at the viewer, the glass crisp in the foreground as Brother Jack's blurred profile, cigarette dangling from mouth, hovers in the background (see Fig. 4). The caption informs the viewer "Horror jars the hero when the leader of the Brotherhood [. . .] accidentally dislodges his eye [. . .] the Brotherhood's inhumanity and lack of dignity are revealed at last."[94] In the photograph, as in the novel, the

[93] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 474.

[94] Ellison and Parks, "A Man Becomes Invisible," 10.

mechanical and political functions of "vision" are conflated in a surreal portrait. The grotesque stare of the glass eye reveals the Brotherhood's faulty political vision. In its refusal to see race as a salient category of analysis and action, the organization relegates its Black members to performing perfunctory roles as mouthpieces for a cause that fails to see them and serve them. Through the Brotherhood, Ellison critiques the racism and authoritarianism of Leftist political organizing. Barbara Foley traces the author's own disillusionment with the Left, contending that *Invisible Man* "emerged only after a protracted and tortuous, wrestling down of [Ellison's] political radicalism."[95] Ellison's work is less of a "wrestling down" and more as a "wrestling with" the interracial and intraracial dynamics of political organizing. Foley goes on to argue that "the novel's repudiation of leftist authoritarianism and scientism and its embrace of democratic pluralism and epistemological ambivalence exhibit not just its protagonists' development from ranter to writer, but the increasing sophistication of the text's creator as well."[96] Seeing Brother Jack and his political vision for what it is, Invisible Man is finally disillusioned with the organization's "inhumanity and lack of dignity" and must forge his own politics, one that can only emerge from underground.

Invisible Man underground—speaking from within his hole, illuminated by light, poised for action as he authors his own narrative—has become the emblematic image of his and the novel's own political vision. By the end of the novel, Invisible Man accidentally falls into an open manhole while trying to escape from Ras the Destroyer in the midst of a riot. He decides to stay underground and lives "rent-free in a building rented strictly to whites, in a

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[95] Much of Ellison's earlier and more journalistic writing was published in Leftist periodicals, such as *New Challenge, New Masses, Direction, Tomorrow, Negro Quarterly, Negro Story, Common Ground,* and others. See Barbara Foley, *Wrestling with the Left: The Making of Ralph Ellison's* Invisible Man (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), 2.

[96] Foley, *Wrestling with the Left*, 4-5.

section of the basement that was shut off and forgotten during the nineteenth century."[97] In that Harlem basement, Invisible Man finds "a home—or a hole in the ground, as you will" and begins siphoning electricity to power 1,369 lightbulbs to "illuminat[e] the blackness of [his] invisibility."[98] While Invisible Man syntactically links his (in)visibility to his Blackness, the playful tension between illumination and (in)visibility suggests a dialectical rather than ontological relationship. This relationship evokes Hall's contention that:

> We are always in negotiation, not with a single set of oppositions that place us always in the same relation to others, but with a series of different positionalities. Each has for us its point of profound subjective identification. And that is the most difficult thing about this proliferation of the field of identities and antagonisms: they are often dislocating in relation to one another.[99]

Ellison is careful to avoid fixing Blackness within a static sphere of (in)visibility. With the 1,369, Invisible Man does not merely throw his Blackness against a sharp White background.[100] Instead, in a statement that hinges on the perceived opposition between illumination and (in)visibility, he positions himself in relation to both, asserting his Blackness through this visual imagery and antagonism.

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[97] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 5-6.

[98] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 13.

[99] Hall, "What Is This 'Black' in Black Popular Culture?" 31.

[100] Here, I pull language from Zora Neale Hurston's "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," which I return to in Chapter Two. See Zora Neale Hurston, *How It Feels to be Colored Me* (American Roots, 2015), no page.

Figure 5. Invisible Man illuminated within his underground home. Gordon Parks, *Invisible Man Retreat*, Harlem, New York, 1952. Image courtesy of the Gordon Parks Foundation.

The final image in Ellison and Parks' *Life* series stages this illumination of (in)visibility to unravel its dialogical imagination (see Fig. 5). It features a photographic representation of Invisible Man underground surrounded by an abstract background of lightbulbs. The photograph takes up the entire page and bleeds into the hinge of the magazine and onto the page before it. Invisible Man sits legs-crossed on a stool in the center of the photograph, surrounded by a halo of light from the lightbulbs behind him. While his body squarely faces the viewer, he does not reciprocate their gaze but instead looks down toward a record player that occupies his attention. The informed viewer will hear the soundtrack of the

image: Louis Armstrong's "Black and Blue," a song that Invisible Man calls "the invisible music of [his] isolation."[101] He implores, "Perhaps I like Louis Armstrong because he's made poetry out of being invisible."[102] Connecting music, poetry, and visuality, Invisible Man reflects on the multimedia and multisensory ways he himself makes sense of his own (in)visibility as a site of cultural expression. Likewise, Parks' photograph signals visually, sonically, and aurally in its representation of the novel's underground aesthetics and politics. In this photographic setting, where visuality might seem to take priority, other sensory ways of seeing and knowing reveal themselves.

The lightbulbs further illuminate the phenomenological and epistemological experience of being underground. In the photograph, they are connected to each other by a cord that creates abstract lines that map the labyrinthine space of Harlem. In "Harlem is Nowhere," Ellison's first collaboration with Parks, he describes Harlem itself as an underground space: "To live in Harlem is to dwell in the very bowels of the city; it is to pass a labyrinthine existence."[103] Harlem's labyrinthine conditions, the material conditions in which predominantly Black and Brown Americans are "overcrowded and exploited politically and economically" are the very conditions of possibility within "Harlem is Nowhere" and *Invisible Man*. The oblong halo of light that envelopes Invisible Man fades into the dense blackness of the night sky sprinkled by the New York City skyline. The lights of the city in the background of the image pale in comparison to the bright light that surrounds Invisible Man. The lights illuminate a blackness that fills much of the page and

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[101] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 13.

[102] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 8.

[103] Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 295.

inches its way onto the next. Blackness signifies in its plurality: as an aesthetic vacuum, as a space of possibility, as a racial identity, as a political positionality, and an epistemological location. Parks' image of Invisible Man gives visual form to this underground space of possibility, as the protagonist sits in suspense in his underground home, a future anterior space from which he theorizes his own (in)visibility and plans for action.

Punctuating Racialized Time and Underground Epistemologies

Parks' photographs draw on and dramatize the visual tropes and metaphors already at play in *Invisible Man*'s exploration of different frameworks for envisioning the political. Just as Parks' photograph gives visual form to the novel's visual imagination, in particular the emblematic image of Invisible Man illuminated underground, I argue that Ellison's use of typographic devices, specifically punctuation, signify visually. Uncovering the visual resonances and residues of punctuation throughout the novel attunes readers to the way that (in)visibility gives Invisible Man a unique temporal and epistemological position from which to theorize an alternative politics of belonging. The novel formally evokes this critical, underground consciousness through its episodic starts and stops, through the framing of the prologue and the epilogue, and through the consistent interruptions and pauses of punctuation.

Scholars have traditionally understood punctuation as devoid of content and narrative as devoid of sensation. Elaine Scarry claims, for instance, that "verbal art, especially narrative, is almost bereft of any sensuous content. Its visual features, as have often been observed, consist of monotonous small black marks on the white page."[104] Scarry's comments, which speak to widely held disciplinary conceptions and conventions within

[104] Elaine Scarry, *Dreaming by the Book* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 1999), no page (epub version).

literary studies, position literature as purely mimetic. This positioning flattens literature's aesthetic and cultural work to a series of silent marks on the page. How might an attention to the multisensory methods through which literature signifies lead to unheard formal and political registers? Throughout this project, I contend that *all* literature signals visually, not only through the overt use of visual tropes, motifs, and images, but also through subtle movements on the page, such as the use of typography and blank space.

Jennifer DeVere Brody challenges punctuation's marginal status within language and literature as secondary to meaning rather than the bearer of meaning in and of itself, arguing: "Punctuation is performative. Punctuation's figurations are read, discussed, represented, and felt in bodily terms, and by turns talk of punctuation returns us to elements of the body as both tenor and vehicle of communication."[105] For DeVere Brody, punctuation marks visually and performatively capture embodiment on the page. They choreograph breath and pacing, syntactically structuring the reader's own pacing and temporal experience of reading. By explicating the visual performance of punctuation, I do not want to reaffirm the ways that visuality has been used to "read" race on the body in essentialist ways. Instead, building on Fleetwood's work, my analysis "moves away from an analysis of the politics of representation to a concern with how black subjectivity itself is constituted through visual discourses and performed through visual technologies."[106] Rather than seeing punctuation marks as black marks fixed on a white page that signify some sort of essential truth about Blackness, I see them as aesthetic devices that perform the representational slipperiness of that representational category and bring to the fore its polymorphous aesthetic and political

[105] DeVere Brody, *Punctuation*, 6.

[106] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision,* 12.

possibilities. For DeVere Brody, too, punctuation brings together embodiment and epistemology—embodied knowledge—by marking the movements of the mind and its political visions. DeVere Brody argues that "punctuation's paradoxical performances produce excessive meaning, and that such performances are part and parcel of both the politics and poetics of punctuation [. . .] punctuation marks mediate, express, (re)present, and perform—the interactions between the stage of the page and the work of the mind."[107] Attending to punctuations visual and performative interactions underscores how the literature stages seeing, or makes ways of seeing visible on the page. In *Invisible Man*, Ellison's use of punctuation reveals "the interactions between the stage of the page and the work of the mind" that are dramatized by the conceptual and structural framing of the novel, as Invisible Man writes underground as artist, architect, and subject of his own narrative.

Ellison's use of ellipsis signifies and signifies upon the ways in which serialized visual encounters construct Blackness as (in)visible and, thus, outside of national recognition. As Fred Moten argues, "The mark of invisibility is a visible, racial mark; invisibility has visibility at its heart. To be invisible is to be seen, instantly and fascinatingly recognized as the unrecognizable, as the abject."[108] Invisible Man's (in)visibility is induced by racial discourses and visual schemas that attempt to produce knowable Black subjects where, as Fleetwood reveals, "the process of deciphering itself is a performative act of registering blackness as visual manifestation."[109] Those three black dots thrown against a sharp white background evoke the experience of (in)visibility that the text interrogates and recall Zora

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[107] DeVere Brody, *Punctuation*, 5.

[108] Fred Moten, *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 68.

[109] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 6.

Neale Hurston's "How it Feels to Be Colored Me," when she says, "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background," an affective state of estrangement that Parks' photographs simultaneously recall and reject.[110]

In many ways, the ellipsis answers Invisible Man's question, "Could this compulsion to put invisibility down in black and white be thus an urge to make music of invisibility?"[111] The fluidity of those three black marks seem to move along to Louis Armstrong's "Black and Blue," the same song that erupts from Parks' photograph and Ellison's Prologue and Epilogue. In his essay, "Living with Music," Ellison describes music as a way to "reach the unconscious levels of the mind with the least distortion."[112] His use of the ellipsis throughout the Prologue and Epilogue reproduces sound on the page to dive into the epistemological levels and temporal layers of his protagonist's (in)visibility. This descent becomes most apparent in the sermon dream in the prologue in which the "*blackness of blackness*" both "*is. . .*" and "*ain't. . .*," "*will git you. . .*" and "*won't. . .*," "*do. . .*" and "*don't.*," and "*will make you. . .*" and "*un-make you.*"[113] The scene is set in italics, a typographic device that visually cues Invisible Man's dream-state "under the spell of the reefer."[114] The ellipses syntactically links the conceptual ambivalence of "the blackness of blackness" through a string of contradictory and slippery descriptions. In its temporal pauses, it invokes a call and response aesthetics, common to Black aural/oral aesthetics, in which "the end is in the beginning and

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[110] Again, I refer to Zora Neale Hurston, *How It Feels to be Colored Me*.

[111] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 14.

[112] Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, 195.

[113] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 9-10.

[114] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 8.

lies far ahead."[115] Spillers notes how the iterative nature of this opening dream sequence, like the iterative nature of the ellipsis itself, syntactically "distinguishes both the Prologue and the Epilogue, encircling the structure. This principle of iteration, if we look closely, ratifies a decisive ambiguity beneath the surface symmetry of the text."[116] The repetition of those three circular dots that erupt from Invisible Man's dream state elicit the double-edged paradoxes that mark Black (in)visibility throughout the novel and encircle the text as a whole through the structural and conceptual framing of the Prologue and Epilogue. Attending to the multisensory nature of the page—such as the visual, performative, and musical aspects of punctuation—provides one entry point into these layers or lower frequencies just beneath the surface of the text that Spillers describes. This interpretive route follows the labyrinthine repetitions, reversals, and returns of the underground. As Spillers points out, "the image-flow" of the dream "is both acoustical and visual." Through this multisensory experience, under the influence of Louis Armstrong's music and other substances, Invisible Man inhabits an "ancestral time and space" that "reaches back through the generations and extends forward into the frontiers of the future."[117]

Punctuation's typographic starts and stops disrupt the reader's experience of narrative time and playfully perform the racialized tempos and temporalities of (in)visibility. For Wanzo, Black Americans' experience of partial or estranged citizenship is connected to the experience of time: "Waiting and patience have thus been essential to majoritarian configurations of good black citizenship in the United States."[118] Julius B. Fleming Jr. also

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[115] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 6.

[116] Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, 70.

[117] Spillers, *Black, White, and in Color*, 72 & 67.

[118] Wanzo, *The Content of Our Caricature*, 76.

argues that structures of time have "historically produced and vitalized antiblackness and white supremacy by compelling black people to wait [. . .] whether in the barracoon or the dungeon of the slave castle, in the hold of the slave ship or atop the auction block, whether waiting for emancipation or being cautioned to 'go slow' in the pursuit of full citizenship."[119] Certain architectures of time, like the demand for Black patience, maintain the afterlives of slavery and uphold structures of White supremacy.[120] Yet, as Fleming points out, Black artists turn these historical geographies of Black time "into radical sites of black political action, aesthetic innovation, and embodied performance."[121]

In *Invisible Man*, punctuation stages the racialized time of (in)visibility on the page to challenge the hegemonic timeline of American progress. Notions of time in the novel are often understood through visual representations, such as: the portrait of Invisible Man's grandfather that haunts him, the photographs that trace the history of the college outside of Dr. Bledsoe's office, the symbol of the single drop of black paint that is necessary to create the "optic white" paint. Invisible Man explains the relationship between visuality and temporality in the Prologue when he says, "Invisibility, let me explain gives one a slightly different sense of time, you're never quite on the beat."[122] The slightly different sense of time that Invisible Man theorizes in the Prologue is present in the novel's overt structure and in its

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[119] Julius B. Fleming, Jr., "Transforming Geographies of Black Time: How the Free Southern Theater Used the Plantation for Civil Rights Activism," *American Literature* 91, no. 3 (September 2019): 589.

[120] Saidiya Hartman describes the afterlives of slavery: "If slavery persists as an issue in the political life of black America, it is not because of an antiquarian obsession with bygone days or the burden of a too-long memory, but because black lives are still imperiled and devalued by a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched centuries ago. This is the afterlife of slavery—skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment." Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2007), 6.

[121] Fleming, "Transforming Geographies of Black Time," 587.

[122] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 8.

subtle gestures of punctuation, in particular the sustained pause or interruption of the parenthesis. The novel's prologue and epilogue frame the narrative like a parenthesis. In these sections, Invisible Man's positionality underground, within the hole, is an ironic, strategic pause from which he prepares himself for emergence. Following Moten, I read Invisible Man's "hibernation" as a break or cut, "the broken, breaking space-time of an improvisation," that reveals the freedom drive of Black life, lyricism, and performance.[123] The improvisatory space of the break that frames the novel interrupts and erupts throughout the text in seemingly offhand parenthetical moments. The parentheses insert the critical voice of Invisible Man looking back on his experiences through a sense of remote irony. They burst forth from his position underground—both spatially and in terms of his subversive perspective.

By interrupting the syntax and temporality of the sentence, the parenthesis interjects Invisible Man's reflexive understanding of his own invisibility and allows the narrative to slip into the nonsynchronous temporality of racial time. The double meaning of the parenthesis makes if particularly useful for thinking through the double-edged epistemologies and temporalities of (in)visibility. On the one hand, parentheses immediately mark the information within as non-restrictive, explanatory, an aside or afterthought, and, on the other, it draws attention to that information by setting it apart from the main clause. So, rhetorically they mark information as secondary, but visually they draw attention to it. The first parenthetical interruption appears in *Invisible Man*'s Prologue after the narrator describes nearly beating a "sleepwalker," someone who refuses to see him, to death on the street: "Most of the time (although I do not choose as I once did to deny the violence of my days by

[123] Moten, *In the Break*, 26.

ignoring it) I am not so overtly violent."[124] The subordinate clause is seemingly nonessential by its parenthetical nature, yet it lengthier than the main clause, interrupting the independent clause and delaying its closure. The parenthetical remark also provides more pertinent information. While the main clause reveals only that the burst of violence described is unusual, the parenthetical reveals the narrator's epistemological and political perspective on social violence. The phrase "the violence of my days" subtly alludes the specter of racism without completely disambiguating the nature of the violence. "Violence of my days" attaches the act not just to the individual, to Invisible Man, but to the larger sociohistorical moment, the "days," calling out the violence racism enacts, not in the abstract but through the possessive "my" of Invisible Man's lived experience. This violence is part of a historical arch of anti-Black racism that Invisible Man's parenthetical comment critiques in its content and syntactically interrupts in its form. The interruption reveals and, thus, foreshadows a change in the narrator's perspective: the reader now knows that he "once" chose to deny the violence by ignoring it, and, of course, what comes in between the Prologue and the Epilogue is Invisible Man attempting to deny and evade the violent racism of his days. The parenthesis reveals the narrator's epistemic privilege and distance, his ability to see the violence of racism from below. Through the parenthetical comments, the reader glimpses what W. E. B. Du Bois describes as the curse and the gift of "second-sight," or "double-consciousness," a critical response to navigating and surviving the contradictions of being both Black *and* American and, thus, to be viewed as a problem.[125]

[124] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 5.

[125] Du Bois, *The Souls of Black Folks*, 2.

The recursive structure of the novel as a whole and Ellison's use of parenthetical remarks formally disrupt the linear narrative of American exceptionalism that leaves so many behind. Invisible Man critiques these temporalities of "progress" when he critiques Euro-American ideologies of culture:

> Those two spots [Broadway and the Empire State Building] are among the darkest of our whole civilization—pardon me, our whole *culture* (an important distinction, I've heard)—which might sound like a hoax, or a contradiction, but that (by contradiction, I mean) is how the world moves: Not like an arrow, but a boomerang. (Beware of those who speak of the *spiral* of history; they are preparing a boomerang. Keep a steel helmet handy.) I know; I have been boomeranged across my head so much that I now can see the darkness of lightness.[126]

Through the parentheticals, Invisible Man critically comments on the shape of time and the movement of history, yet despite the bit of their tone, they avoid a simplistic didacticism. The interruptions interrupt themselves, returning to themselves like a boomerang, as Invisible Man qualifies and multiplies meaning: "(an important distinction, *I've heard*)" or "(by contradiction, *I mean*)."[127] The double-qualification of these parentheticals not only interrupt but also indict the temporalities of racial capitalism through their use of irony. Dorothy J. Wang argues that irony is not just a speech act but a way of life that reveals a certain existential position or point of view and mediates an ideological critique.[128] The last parenthetical moment—"(Beware of those who speak of the *spiral* of history; they are preparing a boomerang. Keep a steel helmet handy.)"—clearly announces Invisible Man's

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[126] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 6; emphasis original.

[127] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 6; emphasis added.

[128] Dorothy J. Wang, *Thinking Its Presence: Form, Race, and Subjectivity in Contemporary Asian American Poetry* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2014), 114-115. While Wang analyzes Asian American Poetry, her discussion of irony as an epistemological position and aesthetic strategy is useful for thinking about the relationship between racial formations and aesthetic forms across racialized identities and communities. Irony, then, is not only a mode of critique but also a potential locus for coalitional resistance to Euro-American structures of "culture" and "civilization" that Invisible Man critiques and that are founded on colonialism, White supremacy, and racial capitalism.

ideological critique, as he warns against dominant historical narratives and the material violence they enact. Like the parenthetical aesthetics, Invisible Man's positioning of time is also one of return, like a boomerang, and the structure of the novel mimics this movement as it starts and begins in the same place. The ironic tone of these temporal interruptions is fundamental to Invisible Man's political perspective and subjectivity. In his introduction, Ellison recalls the "taunting, disembodied voice" that pushed its way in despite the fact that he was working on a different project: "Therefore I was most annoyed to have my efforts interrupted by an ironic, down-home voice that struck me as being as irreverent as a honky-tonk trumpet blasting through a performance, say, of Britten's *War Requiem*" (xiv-xv). Ellison, like the reader, is "interrupted" by what he described as a willful voice that erupts forth from the underground. Tracing the parenthetical interruptions then provides a hole, much like the manhole Invisible Man falls into, through which to listen to this underground voice that speaks of (in)visibility.

The novel's representation of Brother Tod Clifton, who is murdered by a White police officer, further links visuality and temporality in the novel. Invisible Man works with Clifton in the Brotherhood, but after becoming disillusion with The Brotherhood, Clifton disappears. Invisible Man finds him selling dancing paper Sambo dolls on the street, and, embarrassed and disgusted, Invisible Man forced to confront the same racist stereotype that he tries to rid himself of earlier in the novel. "His failure to escape the image," Hill points out, "replicates his violent effort to dispose of Mary's Sambo bank and mocks his attempt to subvert complicated pictures of black humanity."[129] Shortly after Invisible Man finds Clifton,

[129] Hill, "The Visual Art of *Invisible Man*," 792.

Clifton is arrested by a White police officer for not having a permit to sell on the street,[130] and, after refusing to be pushed around and verbally degraded by the officer, the officer shoots him down and murders him in the middle of the street. In his eulogy for Clifton, Invisible Man points to policing as a tool of racist surveillance and violence, noting how "this cop had an itching finger and an eager ear for a word that rhymed with 'trigger.'"[131] Clifton's death initially leaves Invisible Man stunned and later acts as a turning point for Invisible Man to leave the Brotherhood and its White liberal racism. This swerve does not happen immediately though. Initially, Invisible Man attempts to make sense of Clifton's death through a discourse of history and time: "Clifton had chosen to plunge out of history and, except for the picture it made in my mind's eye, only the plunge was recorded, and that was the only important thing."[132] Choosing to leave the Brotherhood and its racist respectability politics, Clifton plunges himself outside of history and makes a living by peddling visual objects of Black degradation, the Sambo dolls. The dolls, also, seem to exist in some moment outside of time and place, a persistent image that haunts the repertoire of Black visuality. Yet it is Clifton's plunge, not the doll, that creates a lasting picture in Invisible Man's mind's eye.

Invisible Man continues to process Clifton's death and its place within time and space by pondering a scene of visual performance and self-imaging. Immediately following Clifton's death, in a moment imbued with visual politics, Invisible Man contemplates a group of young Black men in zoot suits after witnessing the shooting. Hill argues that "The boys share the extreme position of the Sambo doll, projecting an image that defies historical

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[130] Criminalizing street vendors remains a source of police harassment and violence today that disproportionately affects people of color. More recently in the US, particularly in Southern California, laws around street vendors have specifically targeted Latinx vendors, or "Paleteros."

[131] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 457.

[132] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 447.

containment or scientific explanation in an effort to control the terms of their identity."[133] Like the Sambo doll, a stereotypical image that menacingly exists out of time and place, the boys in the zoot suits resist the visual and aesthetic terms of their present moment. In this moment of civic crisis, or estrangement, Invisible Man contemplates a group of zoot suiters, who stylistically and visually resist the limitations of their present.[134] As he looks on them and reflects on what he has just witnessed, excessive punctuation erupts from the text. In the wake of Clifton's murder, Invisible Man thinks about the lines of futurity and fugitivity available to Black Americans:

> They were men out of time—unless they found Brotherhood. Men out of time, who would soon be gone and forgotten . . . But who knew (and now I began to tremble violently I had to lean against a refuse can)—who knew but that they were the saviors, the true leaders, the bearers of something precious? [. . .] For they were outside, in the dark with Sambo, the dancing paper doll; taking it on the lambo with my fallen brother, Tod Clifton (Tod, Tod) running and dodging the forces of history instead of making a dominating stand.[135]

The ellipsis visually stands in for Invisible Man's inexpressible grief and prescient line of questioning, a caesura that mourns unknown and now foreclosed future. It further enacts and draws out the question mark at the end of the sentence. The parentheses interject into these gaps and into the text's abstract, theoretical questioning and make a statement about the body—both Invisible Man's embodied reaction and the fact of Clifton's death. That last

[133] Hill, "The Visual Art of *Invisible Man*," 792.

[134] This moment should not be overlooked as mere background or local color; it reveals a complex nexus where visual representation and racial politics were being worked out at the time. In the 1940s, the zoot suit—a suit with a wide-shouldered jacket and long wide-legged pants that were cuffed—became a symbol for radicalized minority youth culture, worn by Black and Latinx adolescents of all genders. The amount of fabric required to make a zoot suit marked it as a luxury item (this was part rhetoric around the zoot suit restrictions during World War II) and because of this donning a zoot suit was a stylistic, performative resistance to Black and Brown American's second-class status. The symbol of the zoot suit was being explored in Harlem's artistic networks and in popular visual and print cultures the time. *Life* magazine, for instance, did a photo series on the zoot suiter in 1942, photographed not by Parks but by Marie Hansen, one of three women photographers for *Life* at the time.

[135] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 441.

parenthesis, “Tod Clifton (Tod, Tod),” is a political statement. The repetition of Tod’s name is not an aside or an afterthought; it is a declarative, political act of remembrance and resistance, one that is utilized earlier in the passage that recounts the moment of Clifton’s untimely death.[136] Clifton’s name appears nine times in this paragraph, a powerful assertion to say his name—a call Black Lives Matter activists are still heeding in our contemporary moment, as I explore in the next chapter. The repetition of Clifton’s name throughout this passage and the double evocation of Tod within the parenthetical orally, aurally, and visually mark the temporality of Black life, an experience of being both overdetermined by history and out of time.

The serial foreclosure of Black life and futurity through state-sanctioned murder recalls Fleming’s argument that “time has operated as a historical weapon of antiblack violence and a charged arena of a necropolitical maneuver.”[137] Ellison’s parenthetical refrain—“(Tod, Tod)”—at the level of syntax, interrupts the linear progression of the plot to assert presence and to resist erasure. In this parenthetical moment, the visual poetics and politics of *Invisible Man* erupt from the underground, disrupting the surface of the page and demanding close attention and careful listening. The typographic marks explicate the way that vision and visuality are wielded against Black communities, the embodied and existential experience of being (in)visible, and the way that Black individuals creatively rewrite their own image.

While Ellison’s *Invisible Man* refuses to naturalize the relationship between (in)visibility and Blackness, it does attempt to illuminate it, to expose its epistemological

[136] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 435-436.

[137] Fleming, “Transforming Geographies of Black Time,” 587-588.

stakes, embodied consequences, temporal rhythms, and political possibilities. Poet Terrance Hayes explores and elucidates the novel's visual imagination through bodily term in his poem "How to Draw an Invisible Man." Hayes positions Ellison as the Invisible Man within the poem. The speaker describes Ellison's corpse as bursting with unsung words and images, the shadows of his influences, and the specter of America's failed democracy: "I discovered his body had been hoarding / all these years a luscious slush, a sludge / of arterial words, the raw and unsaid pages."[138] Hayes draws from and expands Invisible Man's proclamation, "I am a man of substance," to consider the fleshy substance inside of Ellison himself. [139] What bursts out of Ellison's body is a visceral representation of Ellison's artistic corpus (playing with the word corpse in the first line of the poem). Like how Invisible Man theorizes his own writing, Hayes locates Ellison's poetics within his body, "tendons of syntax / unraveled from his bones and intestinal cavities, / the froth of singing, stinging, stinking, ink."[140] Ellison's tendons, bones, and intestinal cavities become the raw materials of his syntax, as the very ink of his pages flow from the author's body. Hayes's picture of an excessively embodied poetics evokes the willfulness of Invisible Man's voice, the speculative surrealism of Parks' photographs, and the persistent interruption of Ellison's punctuation. Hayes' poem, which operates around the image of a corpse, is in fact a metaphysical contemplation on aesthetics. While it draws attention to the relationship between embodiment and aesthetics, it does not essentialize Black aesthetics as only a bodily reaction. Ellison's "singing, stinging, stinking ink" are "fraught with the demons, / demagogues, and demigods of democracy" and

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[138] Terrance Hayes, *How to Draw* (New York: Penguin, 2015), 38, lines 3-4.

[139] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 3.

[140] Hayes, *How to Draw*, 38, lines 8-10.

landscapes that feature "elaborate protagonists crawling / through a foliage greener than money in America / before America thought to release anyone / from its dream."[141] Through his alliterative mastery, Hayes emphasizes the way that Ellison's words and his protagonists exist in a critical relationship to American democracy, which ensnares them in the cruel optimism of the American Dream.[142] While Hayes' poem tinges of critique, or at the very least a sense of loss at the words that were left unsaid by Ellison, he pays homage to *Invisible Man* by theorizing how aesthetics might draw out or make visible the fleshy substance of subjectivity. Through a series of visual, visceral images, the poem thinks with and through Ellison's tendons of syntax to draw an alternative relationship to the cruel optimism of the American Dream.

Ellison himself was also concerned with how the literary form might facilitate new ways of seeing that could shift democratic consciousness. He referred to this, through a visual metaphor, as "fictive vision,"[143] an aesthetic corollary to the various political visions that he explores in *Invisible Man* and that Parks adapts in his photographs. In his introduction to *Shadow and Act*, he positions fiction as an agentive form of self-reflection, probing "What does American society *mean* when regarded out of my *own* eyes, when informed by my *own* sense of the past and viewed by my *own* complex sense of the present?"[144] Here, Ellison embraces the specificity of his own singular vision, artistic, historical, and otherwise. Instead

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[141] Hayes, *How to Draw*, 38, lines 11-12 & 15-18.

[142] "Cruel optimism" is a term I take from Lauren Berlant who critiques how the demand for optimism in a heteropatriarchal, White supremacist, capitalist political economy obscures power relations and place the burden on attaining a livable life on the individual. She argues, "optimism is cruel when the object/scene that ignites a sense of possibility actually makes it impossible to attain the expansive transformation for which a person or a people risks striving." Lauren Berlant, *Cruel Optimism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2011), 2.

[143] Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, xxii.

[144] Ellison, *Shadow and Act*, xxii.

of offering a universal perspective on the past or an objective picture of the present, fiction's political potential lies in the particularities of positionality. Ellison's *Invisible Man* portrays the particular positionality of Black (in)visibility. This experience of (in)visibility, of being estranged from or forcibly alienated from citizenship, is often accompanied by the threat of violence, as Clifton's death makes most palpable, yet it also threatens the very structures of seeing that attempt to obliterate Black subjectivity. It is from this position, from Invisible Man's place underground, that he begins to forge a radical political consciousness that disrupts temporalities of American progress. The novel is framed by and speaks from the space time of the underground, of the undercommons, of Black fugitivity—a place where, according Stefano Harney and Moten, "the work gets done, where the work gets subverted, where the revolution is still black, still strong."[145] It is from this crucial place that Invisible Man emerges to proclaim, "I am an invisible man,"[146] and it this critical positionality that we hear and see in Parks' black and white photographs and in Ellison's performative gestures of punctuation.

[145] Stefano Harney and Fred Moten, *The Undercommons: Fugitive Planning and Black Study* (New York: Autonomedia, 2013), 26.

[146] Ellison, *Invisible Man*, 3.

Chapter Two

Looking Back to Black Feminist Futures: Staging the Oppositional Gaze in Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*

Figure 6. Johari Osayi Idusuyi in the upper right corner reads *Citizen* during a Trump rally. Image courtesy of Guardian News & Media Ltd.

Just over a year after its publication, Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric,* became a symbol of political protest when poet and then student Johari Osayi Idusuyi began publicly reading it at a rally for then presidential candidate Donald Trump on November 9, 2015 (see Fig. 6). By picking up a book, Idusuyi visibly disengaged from the populist aesthetics of the rally and refused to comply with normative expectations of citizenship within that particular context.[147] Idusuyi had been approached by one of Trump's staff members to sit in a VIP

[147] In an interview with Kara Brown, Idusuyi explains that, while she was not a supporter of Trump, she went to the rally "with genuine intentions" in hopes that he would "talk about something of substance." Disappointed when he did not and frustrated with the aggression that Trump and his supporters displayed toward anti-Trump protesters, Idusuyi chose, rather to leave the rally, to stay seated and read. The book she had on her at the time was *Citizen*, so she decided "I'm on camera, so why not use the opportunity to promote a great book?" See Kara Brown, "A Conversation with Johari Osayi Idusuyi, the Hero Who Read Through a

section behind the stage, a targeting and tokenizing of Black individuals to signal Trump's supposed cross-racial popularity. This strategic placement reveals the inherent contradictions of the visual politics of race: the staff member attempted to render Idusuyi hypervisible in order to invisibilize the White supremacy on which Trump built his presidency. At the same time, Idusuyi, through her public performance, rejects and resists these dynamics. She creatively makes use of *Citizen*, particularly its cover image, to rearticulate what her presence in that setting signals—a moment of visual aesthetics and performance in action.

Damon Young deemed Idusuyi "the Blackest Person Who Ever Lived this Week" in an article for *The Root*, quipping, "she's a Black woman reading a book in a public space. And you can't get much Blacker than that."[148] Young's hyperbolic statement nods to the ways that Black activists have strategically staged themselves within public spaces to highlight and resist the presumed neutrality or normalcy of White supremacy. In the screen captures of Idusuyi, she refuses to compliantly participate in the political performance of the rally. While there are a couple of other skeptical visages in the crowd, predominantly from spectators of color, Idusuyi's face, nose-down in a book, stands in stark contrast against the "sharp white background" of smiling, bored, or complacent White faces.[149] Chad Bennett builds on Young's statement, noting how "the image of Idusuyi reading in public more specifically evokes a history of Civil Rights resistance distilled, for example, in photographs

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Trump Rally," *Jezebel*, Nov. 12, 2015, https://jezebel.com/a-conversation-with-johari-osayi-idusuyi-the-hero-who-1742082010.

[148] Damon Young, "Johari Osayi Idusuyi (The Woman Reading at The Trump Rally) Is the Blackest Person Who Ever Lived This Week," *The Root*, Nov. 11, 2015, https://www.theroot.com/johari-osayi-idusuyi-the-woman-reading-at-the-trump-ra-1822522624.

[149] Here, I pull language from Zora Neale Hurston's "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," which appears in Section III of Rankine's *Citizen* and will reappear as a framework for analyzing the visual politics of race in this chapter. See Zora Neale Hurston, *How It Feels to be Colored Me* (American Roots, 2015), no page.

of Black men and women antagonized while reading during lunch counter protests."[150] Idusuyi was indeed antagonized by the Trump supporters sitting behind her, remarking in an interview that the verbal abuse that anti-Trump protesters received from both the presidential candidate and his supporters at the rally was "really unbelievable and that's what made me mad."[151] Idusuyi's quiet act of protest resists the social violence of the rally on two visual registers. First, she rejects the terms of visual objectification and tokenization by refusing to perform compliant citizenship. Second, the cover image, which has come to visually signal the pervasiveness of anti-Black racism, troubles the presumed neutrality or innocence of that space. Idusuyi's act of protest reveals the continued salience of Rankine's cover image and exemplifies how Rankine's poetry intervenes, as Jeffrey Clapp maintains, in "the visibility regime of American democracy."[152] This intervention hinges on the collection's multimedia form, in particular its intertextual network of images.

In his analysis of the viral image of Idusuyi, which extends into a meditation on Rankine's situation videos,[153] Bennet seeks to look beyond modes of visible resistance that have been privileged within discussions of African American culture. Instead, he looks to the way these forms of visual culture trouble the boundary between public and private to put "inner life on public display," attending to Black interiority via Kevin Quashie and Elizabeth

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[150] Chad Bennett, "Being Private in Public: Claudia Rankine and John Lucas's 'Situation' Videos," *ASAP/Journal* 4, no. 2 (May 2019): 379, httpss://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2019.0018.

[151] Kara, Brown, "A Conversation."

[152] Jeffrey Clapp, "Surveilling Citizens: Claudia Rankine, From the First to the Second Person," in *Spaces of Surveillance: States and Selves*, eds. Susan Flynn and Antonia Mackay, (Cham: Palgrave McMillan, 2017), 172.

[153] According to Rankine's website, these situation videos are "a multi-genre response to contemporary life in the twenty-first century." They "interrogate the political and cultural impact of catastrophic events on individual lives through layered responses." Scripts for some of these situation videos appear Part VI of *Citizen*. See John Lucas and Claudia Rankine, "Situations," Claudia Rankine, accessed October 26, 2021, http://claudiarankine.com/situations/.

Alexander.[154] Like Bennet, I am not interested in celebrating iconic images as transparent acts of resistance. Visual studies scholar Nicole R. Fleetwood critiques this notion of "black iconicity" as "a site for black audiences and the nation to gather around the seeing of blackness" that effaces the complexity of Black life and "is interwoven into the national narrative of democratic progress and American exceptionalism."[155] While I am cognizant of the easy elisions between and among visuality, Blackness, and national narratives of progress (which is exactly what I explore in my analysis of the visual imagination of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* in Chapter One), my sustained analysis of Rankine's visual poetics in *Citizen* bespeaks my desire to grapple with how this intertextual network of images signifies beyond the primacy of the visual to challenge the assumption that race is a stable imagetext.[156] Drawing on insights from queer formalism, new media and visual studies, and Black feminist thought, this chapter uncovers the multi-sensory registers through which these "images enunciate alternative accounts of their subjects," as visual studies scholar Tina M. Campt suggests vernacular visual practices have the power to do.[157]

To stage these alternative accounts of citizenship, Rankine punctuates her poetry with a collection of images that includes screenshots, journalistic photographs, paintings, and

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[154] Bennet, "Being Private in Public," 379. See also Elizabeth Alexander, *The Black Interior* (Saint Paul: Graywolf Press, 2004) and Kevin Quashie, *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2012).

[155] Nicole R. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision: Performance, Visuality, and Blackness* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2011), 10.

[156] W.J.T. Mitchell employs typographic conventions to explore the intersections of image and text. He uses "image/text" to designate "a problematic gap, cleavage, or rupture in representation;" "imagetext" to designate "composite, synthetic works (or concepts) that combine image and text;" and "image-text" to designate the "*relations* of the visual and verbal." Rankine's *Citizen* is an imagetext, a composite work that synthesizes image and text, which explores the image-text of race and citizenship, the social and visual relations that circumscribe each. See W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 89.

[157] Tina M. Campt, *Listening to Images* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 5

modern visual, plastic, and performing arts. *Citizen*'s visual citations, contextualized by Rankine's poetry and by their own histories of production and circulation, stage how anti-Black racism reproduces itself through visual encounters—from quotidian acts of misrecognition to spectacular, serial images of state-sanctioned violence and murder. Through these images, Rankine creates a visual grammar that compresses time and space in the text, linking intimate experiences of misrecognition to longer histories of anti-Blackness in the United States.[158] The visual and verbal cross-discursivity of *Citizen*—the way that the interplay of word and image—stages dialogues between what Rankine theorizes as the "historical self" and the "self."[159]

Like the unexpected punctuation of images throughout the volume, the organization of this chapter takes on a somewhat syncopated rhythm, as I contextualize the production and circulation of the original images, analyze them within the context of Rankine's poetry, and consider their political resonances and implications. Through this visual poetics, Rankine's text actively theorizes Black feminist epistemologies of seeing through a poetics of what I call *visual hyperlinking*: imagistic interruptions that link intimate, individual experiences of anti-Black racism to longer histories and structural critiques to create an alternative rhythm, syntax, and grammar of seeing Black feminist futures. The images cut into the poems, creating a space that draws from the embodied memories of the poetic speaker, the racial consciousness of the viewer or reader, and the authority of intertextual reference. The cumulative effect of these images creates a visual grammar that draws from Black feminist

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[158] My use of the grammatical thinking is also largely informed by Hortense Spiller's foundational tracing of what she calls an "American grammar." See Hortense J. Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book," *Diacritics* 17, no. 2 (1987): 64-81.

[159] Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 14.

theory and futurity to create an oppositional gaze, one that sees the United States for what it is in order to envision what it might become.

Substantive Citizenship and the Substance of Visual Form

From its titular evocation, *Citizen* invites a complex consideration of the relationship between visual and literary form and the substance of citizenship. Its cover features a photograph of David Hammons' found-object sculpture *In the Hood* (1993), a dark green hood that has been crudely severed from the rest of the sweatshirt, nailed to the wall, and given spectral structure through a supporting wire (see Fig. 7).

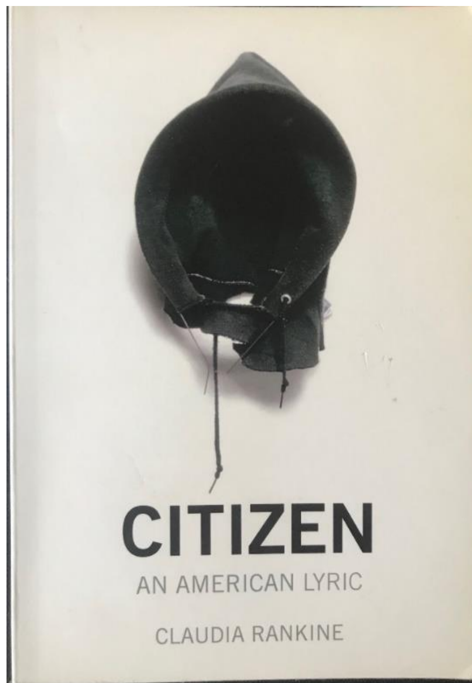

Figure 7. The cover image of Citizen features a photograph of David Hammons' *In the Hood* (1993). Claudia Rankine, Citizen: An American Lyric (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 52-53.

For some, the work's title suggests a physical and imaginative location, "the hood," yet the literalness of the hood simultaneously evokes and deconstructs stereotypical associations between Black masculinity, criminality, and urbanity, what Fleetwood describes as "the trope

of black male as public threat, or the menacing 'hoodie'-wearing black thug of postindustrial American visual culture."[160] The formal structure of Hammons' severed hood also plays with these images. The wire animates the hood to draw attention to the stereotype that is still very much alive within American visual culture and national consciousness and that continues to haunt Black men and Black communities. At the same time, the fullness of the hood asserts and affirms presence. The space of the hood, both symbolic and literal, is not empty but in a state of suspended animation. The roughly cut fabric signifies the real, material violence that haunts Black communities, yet the piece also refuses the narrative that Black urban spaces are sites only of social death.

According to Hammons, who takes the iconography of everyday life and turns it into prints, drawings, performances, video, paintings, and found-object sculptures, "outrageously magical things happen when you mess around with a symbol."[161] His art leans toward the conceptual and the symbolic to plumb the contradictory experience of being both Black and American. His severed scrap of cloth foreshadowed the hooded image of Trayvon Martin that became a visual symbol and rallying cry for the Black Lives Matter Movement. Both images act as iconic metonyms for the fatal consequences of systemic anti-Black racism. *In the Hood* was first shown at the Mnuchin Gallery in New York in 1993 but has since accrued meaning in light of the Black Lives Matter Movement, which was founded in 2013 in response to Martin's murder. *Citizen* emerged in 2014, on the heels of the Black Lives Matter Movement's founding, as a text that was deeply engaged with its present moment, illustrating the brutal ordinariness of scales of serial anti-Black violence, from the intimate to the

[160] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 157.

[161] David Hammons in conversation with Laura Hoptman, "David Hammons," *MoMA*, accessed March 28, 2022, https://www.moma.org/artists/2486.

institutional, and, like Hammons' art installation, its message was amplified by the surge of protests for racial justice.

While reading Hammons' and Rankine's work against this political backdrop can help illuminate their multiple uses and meanings, neither are reducible to these moments. Poet and critic Evie Shockley, for instance, is critical of how "[*Citizen*'s] reception seems fundamentally linked to its perceived transparency," citing a newspaper review that announces the volume as a "Window into Race" in its title.[162] Because *Citizen* became the artistic representation of the American zeitgeist, Shockley suggests, many readers and critics refuse to see it for what it is—poetry—often mistaking its poetic form for prose, essays, or even non-fiction.[163] These interpretive elisions not only leave Rankine's lyric poetry stranded in generic indeterminacy but also prioritize the collection's content over its formal innovation.[164] The volume's use visual iconography, such as Hammons' cover image, makes it especially susceptible to being flattened into mere social commentary. What if, instead of offering a "window into race," these images troubled the visual field that renders race readable? What if the collection's visual form creates a symbolic static that asks viewers and readers to rethink how they see, or think they see, race and citizenship?

Hammons' work, like Rankine's, speaks beyond and in excess of iconicity. The form and composition of Hammons' *In the Hood* vividly dramatizes and performs the material violence of anti-Black racism and its haunting legacies. As Catherine Zuromskis describes:

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[162] Evie Shockley, "Race, Reception, and Claudia Rankine's 'American Lyric,'" In "Reconsidering Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*. A Symposium, Part I," edited by Daniel Worden, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 6, 2016, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/reconsidering-claudia-rankines-citizen-an-american-lyric-a-symposium-part-i/.

[163] Shockley, "Race, Reception, and Claudia Rankine's 'American Lyric.'"

[164] Shockley, "Race, Reception, and Claudia Rankine's 'American Lyric.'"

> The cover image's association with the Martin tragedy is compounded by the structure of this torn piece of clothing. Upon close inspection, one sees the ends of a thin wire threaded through the channel that holds the tie for cinching the hood against the cold. The effect is to produce a dark empty space within the hood, a ghostly presence where a head should be, or was. The ragged scrap of cloth at the base of the hoodie and the dangling hoodie ties accentuate the violence of the hood's separation from the rest of the garment, hanging like torn entrails from the empty space above.[165]

The hood—the torn fabric animated by wire and filled with a haunting empty presence—becomes a metonym for the violence of anti-Black racism broadly and for the extrajudicial and state-sanctioned murders of Black individuals specifically. "The hoodie Martin was wearing at the time of his death," Zuromskis notes, "became a symbol for the racial profiling that figured Martin, and countless other young black men, as 'suspicious' or 'threatening,' justifying their violent suppression."[166] Zuromskis goes on to note how "the hoodie was quickly appropriated in rallies, marches, and vigils."[167] The hood provocatively exemplifies how "aesthetic innovation and formal manipulation are, however, the very *substance* of many. . . artists' engagement with the legacies of social violence," as Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Peréz contend.[168] The formal substance of Hammons' work—the fraying torn fabric, the lifeless dangling strings, the haunting animation of the wire, the empty fullness that fills the hood—sensuously evokes and critiques the violence of anti-Black racism through aesthetic form.

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[165] Catherine Zuromskis, "Complicating Images, In "Reconsidering Claudia Rankine's *Citizen: An American Lyric*. A Symposium, Part II," edited by Daniel Worden, *Los Angeles Review of Books*, January 7, 2016, https://www.lareviewofbooks.org/article/reconsidering-claudia-rankines-citizen-an-american-lyric-a-symposium-part-ii/.

[166] Zuromskis, "Complicating Images."

[167] Zuromskis, "Complicating Images."

[168] Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Peréz, "Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social," *ASAP/Journal* 2, no. 2 (May 2017): 227, *emphasis* original, https://doi.org/10.1353/asa.2017.0031.

If citizenship is fundamentally a matter of belonging and belonging requires recognition, as I argue in the introduction, then *Citizen* examines how racialized ways of seeing interrupt recognition to reveal citizenship as a category of experience is always already in flux, a status that shifts based on perception. The collection sutures together moments of misrecognition, from the intimate to the institutional, to reveal the visible seams of citizenship—the places where the lines that circumscribe the boundaries of citizenship and who is included within it reveal themselves and begin to fray. Fleetwood argues that "the *visible seam* works through the subtlety of a stitch that sutures but leaves visible the wound that it mends."[169] It is an aesthetic and discursive intervention that is used "to address narrative erasure and to insert a troubling presence in dominant racialized structures."[170] *Citizen* gives poetic form to these narrative erasures, these moments of misrecognition that maintain the racialized social system. While the work's very title announces an engagement with the category of "citizen" and who is included within it, it sits uneasily with the cover image of Hammons' *In the Hood*. The tension between word and image, poetic proclamation and visual interpellation on the cover and in the pages it collects belies the friction between formal and substantive citizenship. The title announces and, in many ways, proclaims citizenship while the cover image disrupts the stability of that status, reminding readers/viewers of the anti-Black racism that prohibits many Black Americans from fully accessing the protections and benefits that citizenship promises. *Citizen's* cover stages this fundamental contradiction, and its pages populate its day-to-day textures.

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[169] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 9.

[170] Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 9.

Marking Race, Seeing Citizenship

By recounting intimate, episodic encounters with anti-Black racism, the poems reveal and redirect citizenship's narrow field of vision, which attempts to reduce individuals (and entire communities) to legible subjects. Many of the moments the poems portray are, in fact, grounded in lived experience. Rankine interviewed friends and strangers while she was working on the book, asking them to share unexpected moments when they had experienced racism. Rankine describes her process, saying, "I wasn't interested in scandal, or outrageous moments. I was interested in the surprise of the intimate, or the surprise of the ordinary."[171] These moments of surprise highlight how, in the post-Civil Rights era of colorblind racism , racism does not always operate in grossly obvious or spectacular ways but through covert and coded actions of aggression.[172] Cumulatively, these racist acts create an culture in which "antiblackness is pervasive as climate." [173] *Citizen* illustrates this atmosphere of anti-Blackness moves through a visual field that renders Black Americans simultaneously hyper- and (in)visible, building on my analysis of Ellison's and Parks' work in Chapter One of this project. One poem, citing Judith Butler, examines how the "condition of being addressable" gives language the capacity to hurt:

> For so long you thought the ambition of racist language was to denigrate and erase you as a person. After considering Butler's remarks, you begin to understand yourself

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[171] Claudia Rankine, interview by Meara Sharma, "Claudia Rankine on Blackness as the Second Person," *Guernica Magazine*, November 17, 2014, https://www.guernicamag.com/blackness-as-the-second-person/.

[172] While many critical race theorists have theorized "colorblind" racism and its impacts, I find Devon W. Carbado and Cheryl I. Harris' work a useful starting point. In "The New Racial Preferences," they discuss how color blindness is often associated with race neutrality and race consciousness with racial preference when, in reality, color blindness is used as a veil to cover up structural racism and justify racial inequalities and White privilege. We might think of colorblind racism as the impossible yet pervasive claim, "I don't see race." Devon W. Carbado and Cheryl I. Harris, "The New Racial Preferences," in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* 3rd Edition, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 25-30.

[173] Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), 106.

> as rendered hypervisible in the face of such language acts. Language that feels hurtful is intended to exploit all the ways that you are present.[174]

Thinking alongside Butler, the poem theorizes how these moments of racial marking hinge on the creation of hypervisibility, a simultaneous erasure and exploitation of presence. Throughout the collection, the poems also address the embodied consequences of these cumulative assaults, the way that "words encod[e] the bodies they cover."[175]

Citizen collects and rehearses these repetitious encounters. It catalogues the serial nature of anti-Black racism across scales of violence: recalling intimate moments of misrecognition between coworkers, friends, and strangers; documenting the repetitious nature of state-sanctioned violence and murder; and visualizing the slow violence of structural racism. Some poems seem to recall the private memories of the poetic speaker—the skepticism of the man working the cash register, the snide remark of a real estate agent, the thinly veiled comment about affirmative action, failed performances of allyship that begin with "I have a Black friend."[176] Others focus on public histories—an analysis of Serena Williams' career, a critique of the national abandonment of Black communities during Hurricane Katrina and its aftermath, an account of the extrajudicial and state-sanctioned murders of Black individuals at the hands of civilians and police. Without overdetermining the relationship between Blackness and (in)visibility, *Citizen* explores these moments in which visual interpellation becomes a means of racist violence and national exclusion.

An untitled poem from Part I dramatizes visuality as a means of singling out, categorizing, and dismissing through the metaphor of making out rain falling against a

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[174] Rankine, *Citizen*, 49.

[175] Rankine, *Citizen*, 69.

[176] See Rankine, *Citizen*, 54, 51, 13, 78 respectively.

backdrop of trees. The speaker describes that "You need your glasses to single out what you know is there because doubt is inexorable; you put on your glasses."[177] The glasses are not simply a tool of objective observation; they are means of identification and exclusion, used to single out. They confirm what "you" know is there but cannot help but doubt, in the context of this poem, the fact that it is raining. Vision becomes an authenticating device that confirms what we already know to be true yet only with corrective lenses. The onlooker sees that indeed "the trees, their bar, their leaves, even the dead ones are more vibrant wet" and confirms, "Yes, and it's raining."[178] The poem then extrapolates from this quotidian act of putting on one's glasses to see the rain on the trees: "Each moment is like this before it can be known, categorized as similar to another thing and dismissed, it has to be experienced, it has to be seen." The poem transforms this mundane moment into a visual metaphor to describe an occularcentric epistemology, a process of perceiving and knowing the world that uses sight as means of categorization.[179] Importantly, this process relies on the type of generic standardization, separating based on similarity before ultimately dismissing. The presumed authenticating factor of vision has also historically been used to construct racial fantasies that presume race as immutable, a fact of the body that is legible on the surface of

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[177] Rankine, *Citizen*, 9.

[178] Rankine, *Citizen*, 9. The description of the wet trees evokes the imagistic scene of Ezra Pound's "In a Station of the Metro," situating Rankine's work within a longer tradition of imagistic poetry. Ezra Pound, "In a Station of the Metro," *Poetry Foundation*, Accessed February 16, 2022, https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poetrymagazine/poems/12675/in-a-station-of-the-metro.

[179] While Martin Jay recognizes that "modernity has been normally considered resolutely occularcentric," he also notes that "the scopic regime of modernity may be best understood as a contested terrain, rather than a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices." This occularcentric epistemology, then, is never totalizing, even as the conflation of vision and knowledge is pervasive to Western modernity's attachment to Cartesian perspectivalism. Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," 3-4.

the skin. Vision becomes a means of finding similarities, categorizing into social hierarchies, and dismissing.

Citizen works to unravel how these racist ideologies construct our field of vision and vice versa. For the speaker, these moments "stink"[180] with exclusion and inevitably lead to inexorable doubt: "What did he just say? Did she really just say that? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth?" These questions underscore how "racial gaslighting," as Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith define, acts as a form of social and psychic violence that manipulates people of color in order to misdirect attention away from systemic racism. This form of gaslighting affirms White racist epistemologies of ignorance while dismissing the lived experience of others.[181] The poem's list of questions illustrates and draws attention to this type of racial gaslighting.[182] The very presence of the question draws attention to a moment of discomfort. The questions prick, probe, and prod the psychic and social cut of these moments of misrecognition and the exclusion they elicit.

Important to the way that Rankine's poetry calls racialized epistemologies into questions is her use of the second person "you," which she employs throughout the volume to create an uncanny sense of both familiarity and distance. Rankine's use of the second person

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[180] Rankine, *Citizen*, 9.

[181] I discuss these epistemologies of ignorance at length in Chapter One. Tehama Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith also define "gaslighting" as "a systematic effort to discredit claims of racism, typically by means of contradiction, outright denial, misdirection, and lying." Tehama Lopez Bunyasi and Candis Watts Smith, *Stay Woke: A People's Guide to Making All Black Lives Matter* (New York: New York University Press, 2019), 77.

[182] Another poem later in the collection uses a similar line of questioning, asking, "Who did what to whom on which day? Who said that? She said what? What did he just do? Did she really just say that? He said what? What did she do? Did I hear what I think I heard? Did that just come out of my mouth, his mouth, your mouth? Do you remember when you sighed?" The litany of questions counteracts the cumulative assault and repetitious violence of anti-Black racism. Rankine, *Citizen*, 63.

takes on a couple of different resonances. First, the "you" troubles the traditional first-person "I" associated with lyric poetry. It implicates the reader in its poetic utterance, drawing a national conversation and consciousness and distinguishing itself as an *American Lyric*, as the volume's subtitle claims. Kyle C. Frisina claims that the grammatical plurality of Citizen's "you" seems "to offer itself as both a public address to a collective (which collective?) and the inner voice of one's self."[183] This grammatical plurality enacts "a multiple dialogic of differences based on [their] complex subjectivity" that Mae G. Henderson argues is central to how Black women writers represent and critique overlapping power structures:[184]

> If black women speak a discourse of racial and gendered difference in the dominant or hegemonic discursive order, they speak a discourse of racial and gender identity and difference in the subdominant discursive order [. . ..] It is the complexity of these simultaneously homogenous and heterogeneous social and discursive domains out of which black women write and construct themselves [. . .] that enables black women writers to authoritatively speak to and engage both hegemonic and ambiguously (non)hegemonic discourse.[185]

The plurality of *Citizen*'s "you," as a poetic device, is grounded in Black feminist discourse. From that poetic positionality, it resists the hegemony of the lyric mode and of the very category of citizens, creating a discursive plurality that refuses the empty promises of multiculturalism.

Second, the slipperiness of the second person—who is you? Or, rather, who is not you?—speaks to the mutability of race. In her analysis of Nella Larsen's *Passing*, Gabrielle

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[183] Kyle C. Frisina, "From Performativity to Performance: Claudia Rankine's *Citizen* and Autotheory," *Arizona Quarterly: A Journal of American Literature, Culture, and Theory* 76, no. 1 (2020),143.

[184] Mae G. Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer's Literary Tradition," *African American Literary Theory: A Reader*, ed. Winston Napier (New York: New York University Press, 200), 348-368, 351.

[185] Henderson, "Speaking in Tongues," 351-352.

McIntire explores the semiotic slipperiness of race, saying: "perceptions of racial difference inevitably rely on assumptions that are themselves always unstable and ajar [. . .] Race, as such, is an especially elusive signifier, always already displacing both the effects of naming and of corporeality itself."[186] While Rankine's work appears nearly a century after Larsen's *Passing*, McIntire's description of the narrative instability of race aptly describes the poetic effect of Rankine's "you." Even as it lingers in personal encounters, private memories, and intimate moments of misrecognition, taking on some of lyric's confessional nature, it refuses to disclose or delineate a racial positionality. In its utterance, Citizen's "you" interpellates readers, inviting them "to act as an 'alert' and 'open' audience to racism's performative address," as Frisina maintains.[187]

Citizen attests to the fundamental instability of these performative processes. In another untitled poem from Part I, a figure that has "elite status from a year's worth of travel" is already settled into their United Airlines window seat when a girl and her mother arrive, surprised at the sight before them: "The girl, looking over at you, tells her mother, these are our seats, but this is not what I expected. The mother's response is barely audible—*I see,* she says. I'll sit in the middle."[188] The person before the girl challenges her expectations. Perhaps they do not fit the girl's profile for who might have "elite status" with United Airlines and, thus, have seating priority. Perhaps, the girl expects to see her own face, or one like it, in the seat next to her. Regardless, while the exact context of the girl's surprise is never explicitly stated, the moment reveals the limits of recognition and alludes to how it is contoured by race

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[186] Gabrielle McIntire, "Toward a Narratology of Passing: Epistemology, Race, and Misrecognition in Nella Larsen's *Passing*," *Callaloo* 35, no. 3 (2012): 779.

[187] Frisina, "From Performativity to Performance," 148.

[188] Rankine, *Citizen*, 12 (*emphasis* added).

and class. The mother's "I see" attempts to reify race through a visual declaration, which speaks to the insidious elision of sight and understanding. In this moment of categorization and dismissal, the girl and the mother think that they see race when they are, in fact, participating in a field of vision that brings it into being. Seeing, rather than an objective process of observation, renders racial marking. That the mother feels the need to sit in between the girl and the person in the window seat reveal the social violence of vision as a mechanism of anti-Black racism.

While the racial positionalities of the characters within the poem is never explicitly stated, in part because of the slipperiness of the second person you, the placement of this poem in the section and the collection suggests that there is a racialized dynamic at play. First, the section that the poem is in, Part I of the collection, recounts a litany of intimate encounters with anti-Black racism that range from subtle to overt. While Rankine's *American Lyric* invites readers into a democratic conversation, it is undeniably a work that reveal and critiques anti-Black racism, and it does so, in part, through its refusal to satisfy reader's temptation to attach the poetic voice to a static, stable racial identity. Second, the freedom to be unmarked is not experienced equally by all, and this moment is one of racial making and visual marking. At the same time, vision does not move unidirectionally in the poem. The person being interpellated also looks back, and their unexpected presence disrupts the girl's preconceived notions and interrupts the hegemonic gaze of White innocence.[189]

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[189] In "My Dungeon Shook," James Baldwin theorizes White innocence not as accidental but as criminal, as foundational to White racism and anti-Black violence: "and this is the crime of which I accuse my country and my countrymen, and for which neither I nor time nor history will ever forgive them, that they have destroyed and are destroying hundreds of thousands of lives and do not know it and do not want to know it [. . . .] But it is not permissible that the authors of devastation should also be innocent. It is the innocence which constitutes the crime." James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Vintage, 1993), 5-6. In "Stranger in the Village," Baldwin discusses the militancy of this innocence, claiming that "there is a great deal of will power involved in the white man's naivete" and argues that White supremacy as grounded in the illusion of recovering a "European innocence." James Baldwin, *Notes of a Native Son* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1957), 170 & 178.

While Rankine's poems draw attention to visuality as a means of violence, exclusion, and erasure, they also attest to the possibilities of opposition and affirmation. For instance, in one poem, told as if a conversation (perhaps it was conversation that Rankine had as she was interviewing people for the collection), a woman recounts her son being knocked over by a stranger in the subway:

> You feel it in your own body and wince. He's okay, but the son of a bitch kept walking. She says she grabbed the stranger's arm and told him to apologize: I told him to look at the boy and apologize. Yes, and you want it to stop, you want the child pushed to the ground to be seen, to be helped to his feet, to be brushed off by the person that did not see him, has never seen him, has perhaps never seen anyone who is not a reflection of himself.[190]

The stranger the woman describes seems to be plagued by the same "peculiar disposition of the eyes" that Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man* critiques. As Invisible Man notes, "you're constantly being bumped against by those of poor vision," employing vision not simply as the biological process of seeing but as a means of racialized exclusion and violence.[191] In Rankine's poetic return to and revision of Ellison's (in)visibility, the man with poor vision is a stranger on the subway who bumps into the boy and knocks him over. Significantly, the mother asks the man "to *look* at the boy and apologize;" the look is a form of redress for the man's failure, or refusal, to see. Here, the mother and son act as a reverse analog to the

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Since Baldwin's framing, critical race theorists have picked up innocence as a framework for illuminating and critiquing the epistemological mechanisms of Whiteness and White supremacy. Thomas Ross, for instance, argues how arguments against affirmative action invoke the innocent White victim. Thomas Ross, "Innocence and Affirmative Action," in *Critical Race Theory: The Cutting Edge* 3rd Edition, ed. Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2013), 783-793.

[190] Rankine, *Citizen*, 17.

[191] Here, Ellison's protagonist presupposes Hal Foster's understanding that "vision is social and historical" as well as W.J.T. Mitchell's interest in "the social construction of the visual field" and "*the visual construction of the social field*." See Hal Foster, "Preface," in *Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture* No. 2, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Dia Art Foundation, 1988), ix; and W.J.T. Mitchell, "Showing seeing: a critique of visual culture," *Journal of Visual Culture* 1, no. 2 (2002): 171; emphasis original.

mother and daughter on the United Airlines flight in the earlier poem. Whereas that mother's look sought to visually reduce and racially mark, this mother demands a look of recognition, both of her son and of the harm done.

The poem underscores how these acts of unseeing, these moments of misrecognition, have embodied consequences that reverberate beyond an isolated incident. In the poem, the "you" is a listener after the fact, yet they "feel [their] own body wince" as they listen to the encounter.[192] The second person listener too wants the child to be seen, "to be helped to his feet, to be brushed off by the person that did not see him, has never seen him, has perhaps never seen anyone who is not a reflection of himself."[193] The listener calls out the racist vision of White Americans and questions even the possibility of recognition, yet the poem does not conclude there. The man's refusal to see is met with a collective act of resistance. The mother goes on to say that, "The beautiful thing is that a group of men began to stand behind me like a fleet of bodyguards [. . .] like newly found uncles and brothers."[194] This group of men, witnessing this aggressive act of misrecognition, provide their own form of collective support and protection, offering care and kinship "like newly found uncles and brothers." While the poem recognizes the importance of recognition, particularly as a mode of redress, it also recognizes the limitations of recognition, particularly across categories of social difference, as the basis for belonging. Ultimately, it concludes not with the look or apology that the mother wanted but with an alternative, with the "beautiful thing" that is the men's collective action of care.

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[192] Rankine, *Citizen*, 17.

[193] Rankine, *Citizen*, 17.

[194] Rankine, *Citizen*, 17.

Visual Hyperlinking and Scales of Serialized Anti-Black Violence

In both form and content, *Citizen* sutures together these moments of misrecognition while leaving their stitch of their visible seams on display.[195] Each poem recounts a different episode or encounter that is stitched together through the white space of the page and the periodic punctuation of image. The inclusion of Glenn Ligon's series of prints *Untitled (Four Etchings)* in Part III of *Citizen* draws attention to the white space of the page as a container of social codes and racialized signifiers of belonging—refusing to naturalize it as a neutral or empty background. Placing ink onto linen through etching and aquatint, Ligon's *Untitled (Four Etchings)* turns black-on-white and black-on-black words into images to explore the tensions between hyper- and invisibility.[196]

Similar to *Citizen* itself, *Untitled (Four Etchings)* operates as what visual studies scholar W.J.T. Mitchell describes as an "imagetext," a composite work that synthesizes and combines image and text, becoming more than the sum of the two in the process.[197] Two of Ligon's four etchings feature the opening lines of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*: "I am an invisible man."[198] In this way, Ligon's work visually traces and remakes Black artists' orientations toward (in)visibility and acts as a citational link, or a visual hyperlink, within both Rankine's and my own work. The two *Untitled* etchings featured in *Citizen* repeat the lines "I do not always feel colored [. . .] I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background" from Zora Neale Hurston's autobiographical essay "How It Feels to Be

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[195] Fleetwood calls the visible seam "a recurring 'stitch' in black visual cultural practices" that leaves the labor and material of creation on display. Fleetwood, *Troubling Vision*, 157.

[196] Glenn Ligon, *Untitled: Four Etchings*, series of four etchings and aquatints on linen, 1992, (MoMA), https://www.moma.org/collection/works/153232.

[197] W.J.T. Mitchell, *Picture Theory* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1994), 89.

[198] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man* (New York: Vintage, 1952), 3.

Colored Me."[199] Through the process of aquatint, Ligon gives Hurston's words the look of an oily saturation and throws them "against a sharp white background."[200] As *Untitled* unravels into a deliberate illegibility, as text and image become increasingly entangled, it enacts a resistance to and a reorientation of (in)visibility. Through the visual citation to Ligon's work, *Citizen* draws attention to the text's material structure, the surface of the page, as a visual and discursive field that the poems trouble.

In addition to its cover image, *Citizen* comprises eighteen images—including photography, painting, collage, sculpture, and performance art—that punctuate and link various poems throughout the collection. These images work as what I call *visual hyperlinks* to connect scales of anti-Black racism, ranging from intimate moments of misrecognition to public caricatures to state-sanctioned violence. In their appearance, these images alter the spatiotemporality of the page. The photography, for instance, often situates the reader within a past moment to connect the poetic reflections to a longer history and a structural critique. The painting and collage tend to look back at the reader toward speculative Black futures, refusing to recapitulate calcified images of Blackness. Given that some of the works of art that Rankine cites are digital in nature, such as Hennessy Youngman's *Art Thoughtz* YouTube videos or Rankine's own situation videos, understanding them as visual hyperlinks within a wider intertextual network underscores the media specificity and multiplicity of Rankine's work.

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[199] Hurston, *How It Feels to be Colored Me*, no page.

[200] According to the Tate, "Aquatint is a printmaking technique that produces tonal effects by using acid to eat into the printing plate creating sunken areas which hold the ink." See "Aquatint," *Tate*, https://www.tate.org.uk/art/art-terms/a/aquatint.

In considering Rankine's poetics of visual hyperlinking, I draw from media studies scholar Ted Nelson's definition of "hypertext" as "*non-sequential writing*—texts that branches and allows choices to the reader, best read as an interactive screen."[201] Nelson describes "hypertext" as a series of independent texts that are interconnected by links which offer the reader different pathways of experiencing and engaging the work writ large.[202] Rankine's visual poetics— the interruption and eruption of visual art within her poetry— creates pathways that link the reader to other contexts, histories, and media, a citational tunnel by which readers can enter and exit the work. If traditional hyperlinks "form digital footprints of the way individuals make connections," as Stacey Lynn Schulman argues, then Rankine's images create a visual footprint that forges a diverse network of connections between text, reader, and world.[203] Schulman observes that, "through a simple selection to include, exclude, or just follow a link in our daily online interactions, we passively telegraph the way we see the world, what is important to us, to what degree and why."[204] In *Citizen*, Rankine curates a selection of images to telegraph for the reader a way of seeing citizenship that is attentive to its racialized contours and exclusions. The reader may or may not choose to pursue these visual links further, tracing the material histories of the works themselves. These visual pathways move the reader into an interactive engagement with varying histories and contexts and, in doing so, perform the way that citizenship is experienced through serial yet non-sequential episodes of recognition.

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[201] Ted Nelson, *Literary Machines* (1987), 0/1 (*emphasis* original).

[202] Nelson, *Literary Machines*, 0/1.

[203] Stacey Lynn Schulman, "Hyperlinks and Marketing Insight," in *The Hyperlinked Society*, ed. Lokman Tsui and Joseph Turow (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2008), 147.

[204] Schulman, "Hyperlinks and Marketing Insight," 147.

The first poem of the collection sets the stage for *Citizen*'s larger investments in questions of (in)visibility and its poetic practice of visual hyperlinking. In the first poem, the speaker reflects on a childhood memory from school in which another student asks to cheat off of her work.[205] The poem frames this private memory within a private space, the bedroom, in those quiet, exhausted moments before sleep: "When you are alone and too tired even to turn on any of your devices, you let yourself linger in a past stacked among your pillows."[206] Within this intimate, domestic setting, the speaker "fall[s] back into that which gets reconstructed as metaphor."[207] Among the pillows, she slips into an intimate memory that becomes a metaphor for the visual politics of race and the ways they shape belonging as she recalls a childhood experience when a peer coerced her into allowing her to cheat from her work. The speaker describes their relationship, saying, "You never really speak except for the time she makes her request and later when she tells you you smell good and have features more like a white person. You assume she thinks she is thanking you for letting her cheat and feels better cheating from an almost white person."[208] The poem remembers the speaker's experience first with the racism of her peer, who conveniently assuages her own guilt by placing the speaker in closer proximity to Whiteness, and with the racism of the teacher who does not see what is happening precisely because she does not see the speaker.

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[205] In order to avoid confusion between the reader of Rankine's poetry and the reader of my own text, I refer to the poetic speaker of this poem with "she/her/hers" pronouns in my own analysis rather than the "you/your/yours" pronouns that appear in Rankine's poetry. While the second person speaker remains ambiguously defined, or rather indefinable, some of the experiences the speaker recounts suggests that the voice speaks from the positionality of a Black woman. In my use of this pronoun, I am less interested in pinning down the identity of the speaker, which is purposefully slippery in its second person utterance, than I am in avoiding making presumptions about my own reader and avoiding confusion between my own words and Rankine's.

[206] Rankine, *Citizen*, 5.

[207] Rankine, *Citizen*, 5.

[208] Rankine, *Citizen*, 5.

The speaker describes the Sister's refusal to see the power dynamics at play in her own classroom, saying, "Sister Evelyn must think these two girls think a lot alike or she cares less about cheating and more about humiliation or she never actually saw you sitting there."[209] The poem takes an intimate moment of misrecognition to illuminate the paradox of visibility: the way that one's perceived (here, racialized and gendered) particularity can lead to political exclusion and invisibility, or rather the way that processes of exclusion manifest themselves visually.

The photograph that immediately follows the poem connects this personal memory to longer histories of racial exclusion. The photograph is pulled from Michael David Murphy's *Jim Crow Road—2007*, which depicts a series of eight different photographs featuring different locations that have street signs that still bear the name "Jim Crow Road."[210] In his introduction to the album, Murphy says, "In 2007, there is still a place called 'Jim Crow Road.' The road crosses behind an Elementary school, right past the playground. One wonders if the kids there are still being taught what Jim Crow means, in Hall County, which adjoins Forsyth County, known for its infamous 'sundown town' that existed well until the '80s."[211] The place Murphy describes stages a specific instance of "Jim Crow Road"—noting its proximity to Forsyth County, Georgia, infamous for its 1912 riot during which White mobs murdered and terrorized Black residents, essentially driving them from the county and allowing the White residents to take their land and property. At the same time, Murphy's use of that nonspecific article, "a," alludes to an unfortunate repetition and nondescriptness that

[209] Rankine, *Citizen*, 6.

[210] Rankine, *Citizen*, 6.

[211] Michael David Murphy, *Jim Crow Road—2007*, photographs, (2008), accessed June 9, 2020, http://michaeldavidmurphy.com/albums/jim-crow-rd-2007/. Note, this hyperlink is no longer active, nor is it archived, on Murphy's website, https://michaeldavidmurphy.com/.

the series of photographs illustrate. The album reveals many “Jim Crow Roads.” Given the nature of the photographic frame and the repetition of the image with a slight difference, that “a place” that Murphy describes could be nowhere or any/everywhere. The repetition of the image across the series amplifies the anonymity of the road, emphasizing the pervasiveness of its intent over its local specificity.[212] Murphy’s work highlights a key tenets of critical race theory: racism is ordinary, not aberrational.[213] The title of the piece, which notes the contemporary presence of these signs, all photographed in 2007, underscores how the spectacular racism of the Jim Crow era is not gone but has adapted, operating in more subtle and insidious ways. The album offers a photographic record of the persistent visual shorthand of Jim Crow, which through segregation (both de jure and de facto), attempts to claim all space as White space. The de jure and de facto histories of Jim Crow segregation that the photograph elicits reveal the contentious relationship between citizenship in name (or legal status) and in fact (in practice), or between formal and substantive citizenship.

The integration of Murphy’s photograph reveals the pervasive ordinariness of racism in the post-Civil Rights era. Bella Adams, in her critical race theory reading of *Citizen*, maintains that “Ordinariness and colour-blindess represent a powerful combination remarkably resistant to critique. How do your criticize a hierarchical racial formation that is rendered nearly invisible by its colour (white) and positioning (background) in the contemporary, so-called colour-blind or post-racial United States?”[214] Within Rankine’s text,

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[212] Murphy, *Jim Crow Road—2007*.

[213] Richard Delgado and Jean Stefancic, *Critical Race Theory: An Introduction* (New York: New York University Press, 2001), 7.

[214] Bella Adams, “Black Lives/White Backgrounds: Claudia Rankine’s *Citizen: An American Lyric* and Critical Race Theory,” *Comparative American Studies: An International Journal*, 15:1-2 (2017): 54-71, 55. doi: 10.1080/14775700.2017.1406734.

the incorporation of the image makes visible on the page the White background that Adams references.[215] Similar to the way that Hurston's words trouble the white background in Ligon's *Untitled (Four Etchings)*, the presence of the "Jim Crow Road" sign in Murphy's photograph worries the background of white suburban houses behind it. The suburban background of the photograph illuminates the ways in which racial segregation is written onto our nation's geographies. Following World War II, the suburbs were a project of segregation that was subsidized by the Federal Housing Administration and private lenders at the same time that "urban renewal" programs were destroying communities of color in cities. White families fled to the suburbs to avoid racial intermixing and integration. As George Lipsitz argues, "The suburbs helped turn Euro-Americans into 'whites' who could live near each other and intermarry with relatively little difficulty. But this 'white' unity rested on residential segregation, on shared access to housing and life chances largely unavailable to communities of color."[216] The formal composition of Murphy's photograph, particularly its use of foreground and background, makes visible the long and ongoing history of segregation, revealing the violence through which the "sharp white background" of the suburbs were created. Through the visual hyperlink of Murphy's photograph, Rankine places the speaker's poetic recollection within this history.

In both its original instantiation and its poetic interruption, the photograph compresses time and space. It evokes histories of de jure segregation while reminding

[215] Here Adams draws from Huston's "How It Feels to Be Colored Me." In this short essay, Hurston describes how she feels "most colored when [she is] thrown against a sharp white background." It is important that this is not a point of sorrow or tragedy for Hurston, but a pointed critique of the "paleness" of white America. Rankine draws from Hurston through her incorporation of Ligon's *Untitled: Four Sketches* at the end of Part III of *Citizen.* See Zora Neale Hurston, *How It Feels to be Colored Me*, no page.

[216] George Lipsitz, *The Possessive Investment in Whiteness: How White People Profit from Identity Politics*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1998), 7.

viewers of the contemporary presence of de facto Jim Crow. The poetic framing of the photograph points to the way that these histories of segregation contour lived experiences of belonging. Murphy's photograph enacts through the visual and linguistic shorthand of the "Jim Crow Road" sign what Rankine explores in a later poem as the relationship between the "historical self" and the "self self."[217] Narrating a dialogue between two friends in the present moment, the speaker opens:

> A friend argues that Americans battle between the 'historical self' and the 'self self.' By this she means you mostly interact as friends with mutual interest and, for the most part, compatible personalities; however sometimes your historical selves, her white self and your black self, or your white self and her black self, arrive with the full force of your American positioning [. . .] Instantaneously your attachment seems fragile, tenuous, subject to any transgression of your historical self. And though your joined personal histories are supposed to save you from misunderstandings, they usually cause you to understand all too well what is meant.[218]

Rankine splits the self into the "historical self" and the "self self," the latter ringing of a strange doubling or mirroring. The historical self is identified in the poem as a racialized self, and Rankine's shifting pronouns "her white self and your black self, or your white self and her black self" refuse to fix or clarify racial identity, sliding into a slippery indeterminacy.[219] This doubling of self is also marked by national identity as the argument that is the object of the poem is about the way that "Americans battle" between these selves "with the full force of their American positioning."[220] Just as the Jim Crow past breaks into the present moment in Murphy's photographic and Rankine's poetic renderings, the historical self—the historical

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[217] Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*, 14.

[218] Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*, 14.

[219] Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*, 14.

[220] Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*, 14.

weight of American race relations—breaks into intimate relationships. [221] While the selves that Rankine describes seem to be overdetermined in some ways, in others the uncanny splitting and doubling resists hegemonic histories of racial progress, positing instead a Black feminist poethics that destabilizes epistemological categorizations of race. "Black Feminist Poethics," as theorized by Denise Ferreira da Silva, describes a speculative, creative, and critical disengaging from racial colonialism's categorization of Blackness as "always already a referent of commodity, an object, and the other, a fact beyond evidence."[222] Rankine's visual poetics (or poethics) "[peer] beyond the horizon of thought where historicity (temporality/interiority), framed by tools of universal reason, cannot but yield violence."[223] By bringing the past into the present, Rankine announces and demands a Black feminist speculative future of citizenship. Her visual poetics connect disparate temporalities and scales of history to create a thicker picture of anti-Black racism without yielding to its violence. Instead, in both word and image, *Citizen* draws out the textures and tenors of Black life even as it critiques the sharp White background of anti-Blackness.

Staging the Oppositional Gaze, Performing Black Feminist Futurity

Citizen's visual poetics interweave multiple temporalities and they also stage the seriality of anti-Blackness. The images create a hypertext, or network of independent and interconnected narratives, which invite the reader to experience the episodic, experiential nature of citizenship, challenging its coherence as a closed narrative or stable, discreet category. Even

[221] Rankine's use of the "historical self" is evocative of Frantz Fanon's "historical racial schema," the historical imagination and imposition of race onto the body. Frantz Fanon, *White Skin, Black Masks* (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 91.

[222] Denise Ferreira da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics: The Quest(ion) of Blackness Toward the End of the World," *The Black Scholar*, 44: 2 (2014): 81.

[223] Ferreira Da Silva, "Toward a Black Feminist Poethics," 84.

as *Citizen* collects these serialized episodes of anti-Black racism and violence, it refuses to turn these moments into easily consumed and commodified memes. The images, rather than illustrating, clarifying, or answering, oftentimes slow the momentum of serialized violence, forcing the reader to linger in the time-space of what the speaker describes in one poem as a "cut."[224] Exploring the way that media affects social reality, Safiya Umoja Noble argues that the repeated circulation of the murder of Trayvon Martin in popular and social media swallowed the particularities of his identity and his death in spectacle. This spectacle concentrated the public gaze on a commodified representation of his death that ultimately reinforced hegemonic narratives about Black male criminality and foreclosed opportunities for deeper inquiry into the pervasiveness of anti-Black violence. At the same time, Umoja Noble recognizes that "there are attempts to subordinate the spectacle and to reframe and circulate counternarratives to unpack and make visible systems and practices of power and privilege."[225] *Citizen*, with its evocation of Trayvon on its cover and its memorialization of him and other Black individuals prematurely lost at the hands of White police and civilians, is one of these counternarratives.

Part IV of the collection includes a series of poems modeled off of situation scripts that examine more public histories of anti-Blackness. Their subjects range from Hurricane Katrina to the Jena Six to the World Cup to individual victims of state-sanctioned and extrajudicial killings. These poems are the only ones in the collection that include a title and a brief didactic identifying each as a "script for Situation video created in collaboration with

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[224] Claudia Rankine, *Citizen*, 42.

[225] Safiya Umoja Noble, "Teaching Trayvon: Race, Media, and the Politics of Spectacle," *The Black Scholar* 44, no. 1 (2014): 14.

John Lucas," Claudia Rankine's creative and life partner. One of these poetic scripts is titled, "February 26, 2012 / In Memory of Trayvon Martin."[226] Even as the titular page memorializes loss, it is haunted by presence. The silhouette of the image from the previous page —Toyin Odutola's *Uncertain, yet Reserved*, a silky portrait of a boy whose photorealistic eyes gleam defiantly out from a face drawn with a ballpoint pen and highlighted with colorful acrylic paint—remains visible (although in reverse) on the next (see Fig. 8). [227] Here, the materiality of the book, the way that the image from one page visibly persists onto the next attests to the way that they act as visual hyperlinks, tunnels or wormholes into and out of the text and its strange temporalities.

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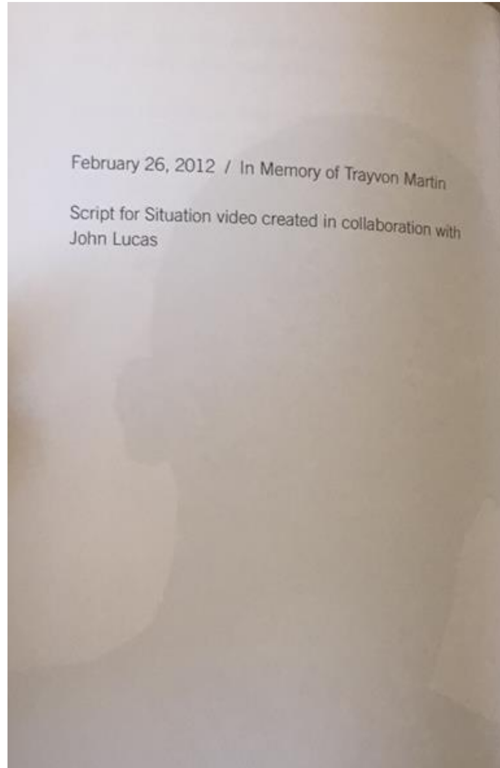
[226] Rankine, *Citizen*, 88.

[227] Rankine, *Citizen*, 86-88. Like Rankine, Odutola is both a citizen and an immigrant. She was born in Nigeria and moved as a child to Alabama. Much of her work includes profiles and silhouettes drawn with basic drawing materials (ballpoint pens, pencils, pastels, and charcoal) to represent the various textures and hues of Black skin, playing with the way that race gets visually coded onto the skin. For more see "Biography: Toyin Ojih Odutola," J*ack Shainman Gallery*, accessed March 1, 2022, https://jackshainman.com/artists/toyin_ojih_odutola. While I do not go into detail in this chapter, part of my interest in Rankine's visual citations is their transnational politics and the ways that they speak (and look) back to global anti-Blackness.


February 26, 2012 / In Memory of Trayvon Martin

Script for Situation video created in collaboration with John Lucas

Figure 8. The silhouette of Toyin Odutola's *Uncertain, Yet Reserved* (2012) peers through the title page of "February 26, 2020 / In Memory of Trayvon Martin." Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 88. Image and text courtesy of Graywolf Press.

Rather than recycling images of Martin's death or mining images from his life to prove innocence or construct criminality, as was typical of popular media, Rankine's situation script and video place his murder within a longer history of anti-Black oppression, racism, and violence in the United States.[228] In fact, the situation video, "Situation 5," that shares the poem's script, although with some slight differences, was published to YouTube on July 26, 2011, several months before Martin's death on February 26, 2012. Read in tandem with the video, then, the poem looks into both the past and the future to critique the pervasiveness of anti-Black violence in the present moment. In dedicating the situation script

[228] See Claudia Rankine and John Lucas, "Situation 5," *YouTube* video, 00:04:32, July 26, 2011, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0xx1dwFxAv0.

to Trayvon, Rankine memorializes the specificity of his loss while also noting how these repetitious rehearsals of Black death and grief are ongoing.[229]

The imagery of the poem and video connects the life-threatening violence directed toward Black people to a long history of anti-Black racism and racial capitalism.[230] The poem opens by thinking about criminality and incarceration within this history: "My brothers are notorious. They have not been to prison. They have been imprisoned." The word notorious recalls stereotypical images that always already code Black boys and men as criminals. While Rankine's use of "brothers" targets the systemic criminalization of Black masculinity, Black girls and women are not immune to this violence either, and their experiences with policing and police violence, which are also uniquely informed by the intersections of race and gender, have been conspicuously absent from many social justice frameworks, as the #SayHerName campaign has brought to the fore. While Rankine's emphasis on "brothers," like the focus on Black men throughout Part VI, fails to recognize the ways that Black women experience police violence, the use of "brothers" does carry a certain political resonance. It is simultaneously intimate and political, personal and collective, evoking the language of the Black Power Movement.

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[229] Maya Angelou describes these rehearsals of violence and mourning as creating a "nightmarish sense of déjà vu" in "an eternally running drama" in her short narrative about Black Panther George Jackson's funeral. Maya Angelou, "Rehearsal for a Funeral," *The Black Scholar* 6, 9 (1975): 6. Responding to this piece, Sage Gerson, Taylor Holmes, and Nirvana Shahriar observe that "Rehearsal is a form of performative repetition (with difference, and in Angelou's rehearsal, there is an uncanny sense of repetition at play with the seemingly endless incidents of police violence that are directed toward Black people and the murders that are often a result of that violence." Sage Gerson, Taylor Homes, and Nirvana Shahriar, "Rehearse, Resist, Riot, Repeat: Policing through Time," in "Social Justice Handbook Series," ed. by Stephanie Leigh Batiste, *The Black Scholar*, July 29, 2020, https://www.theblackscholar.org/social-justice-handbook-series-rehearse-resist-riot-repeat-policing-through-time/.

[230] See Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw and Andrea J. Ritchie (with Rachel Anspach, Rachel Gilmer, and Luke Harris) *Say Her Name: Resisting Police Brutality Against Black Women*. *African American Policy Forum*, July 2015, http://static1.squarespace.com/static/53f20d90e4b0b80451158d8c/t/560c068ee4b0af26f72741df/1443628686535/AAPF_SMN_Brief_Full_singles-min.pdf.

The situation video montages images to position the serial murders of Black Americans within a genealogy of violence, interweaving its critique of policing and mass incarceration with the visual iconography the middle passage, the plantation, and Jim Crow. As Rankine, who voices the poem in the video, reads, "Those years of and before me and my brothers, the years of passage, plantation, migration, of Jim Crow segregation. . .," historical images flood the screen: Brookes "Diagram of a Slave Ship," plantation houses, signs of Jim Crow segregation, and Bill Hudson's now infamous image of a teenage Civil Rights demonstrator being attacked by police dogs in Birmingham, Alabama, on May 3, 1963. These images become a discursive frame through which to view the long and ongoing struggle for Black freedom. Analyzing the role of photography in African American social movements, Leigh Raiford explores the "fecund irony" of movement photographs, which are "locked in the moment of their production, froze in time yet moving through history."[231] The photograph itself is "a mode of arrest and incarceration," even as it can be mobilized as a political strategy.[232] Ironically, as it critiques incarceration and other modes of violence, Rankine's situation video relies on these photographs mode of arrest and incarceration to create an undeniable picture of Black struggle in the face of White supremacist violence. Yet, even while the video relies on these iconic images, its cinematic nature refuses to lock them in time or to allow the viewer to voyeuristically linger too long. Like the poem, which understands these histories of violence not of the past but "of and before me and my brothers," the video montage places these images within a strange temporality where these pasts erupt into the present moment. While Rankine tends toward the most iconic and

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[231] Leigh Raiford, *Imprisoned In a Luminous Glare: Photography and the African American Freedom Struggle* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2011), 6.

[232] Raiford, *Imprisoned In a Luminous Glare*, 6.

recognizable images in her "Situation 5" video, she refuses to create a linear narrative of struggle and progress. Instead, enacting a Black feminist poethics, she underscores the repetitious rehearsals of these racist dramas. The collage of word and image in her videos and in her poetry illustrates how, as Campt argues, "the seriality of the untimely forfeiture of black and brown lives to incarceration or premature mortality has become an urgent refrain that echoes backward and forward in time."[233]

The final poem of Part VI makes clear the material stakes of the circulation of Blackness in visual culture and the White imagination. It memorializes and names Black people whose lives have been forfeited to premature death at the hands of White police and civilians. As the poem makes clear, "because white men can't police their imagination black people are dying."[234] This racist violence is not only the result of a failure to police the White imagination but also a result of "policing black life and patrolling the black image," which Eric Lott contends is not incidental but participates in the creation of a state racial fantasy.[235] Rankine's poem memorializes and mourns the fatal consequences of these racial fantasies. In listing the names of those who have been lost due to these racial fantasies and racist violence, however, the list responds to the political call to say their name (see Fig. 9). Preceded by "In Memory of, "the names descend down the page, and the coloring of the text moves from black to grey to nearly transparent as the names drop off and the "In Memory" reaches into an unknown future. The anaphoric listing becomes an imagetext that almost works in the revers of something like Ligon's *Untitled (Four Etchings)* in which the words persisted into

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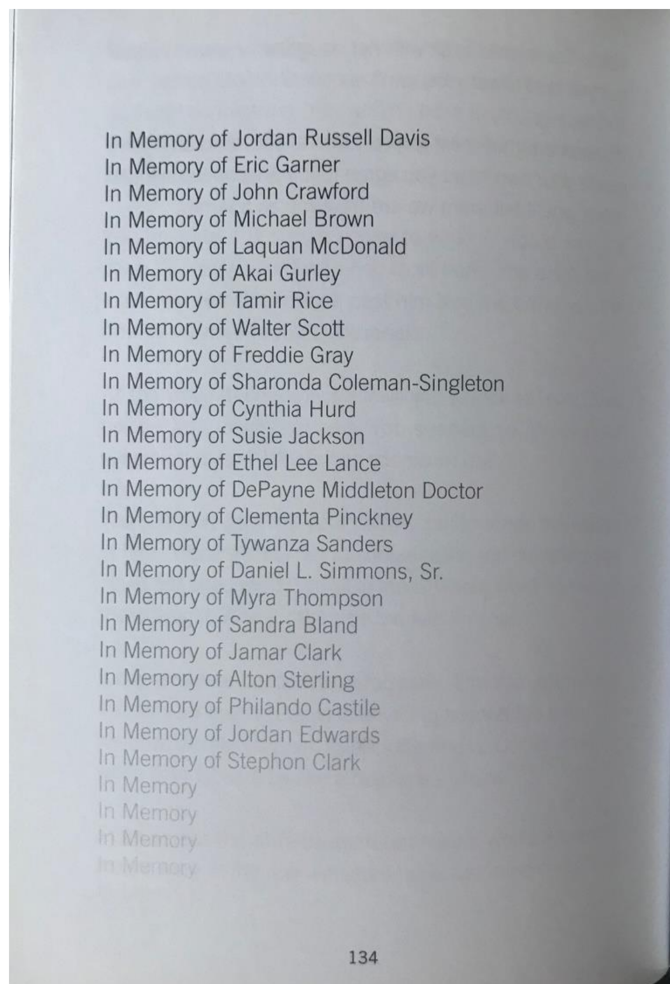
[233] Campt, *Listening to Images*, 106.

[234] Rankine, *Citizen*, 135.

[235] Eric Lott, *Black Mirror: The Cultural Contradictions of American Racism* (Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2017), xv.

an inky illegibility. Here, the words fade into an unknowability. With each printing, the list grows and is updated, evolving to respond to its particular moment of publication even as it places that moment within long history. The names mark the loss of a particular individual; the specificity of the name, of each individual life, grates against the repetition of "In Memory," against the serial repetition of anti-Black violence. As the text fades into the page, that "In Memory" becomes, as Campt contends, "an urgent refrain that echoes backward and forward in time."



In Memory of Jordan Russell Davis
In Memory of Eric Garner
In Memory of John Crawford
In Memory of Michael Brown
In Memory of Laquan McDonald
In Memory of Akai Gurley
In Memory of Tamir Rice
In Memory of Walter Scott
In Memory of Freddie Gray
In Memory of Sharonda Coleman-Singleton
In Memory of Cynthia Hurd
In Memory of Susie Jackson
In Memory of Ethel Lee Lance
In Memory of DePayne Middleton Doctor
In Memory of Clementa Pinckney
In Memory of Tywanza Sanders
In Memory of Daniel L. Simmons, Sr.
In Memory of Myra Thompson
In Memory of Sandra Bland
In Memory of Jamar Clark
In Memory of Alton Sterling
In Memory of Philando Castile
In Memory of Jordan Edwards
In Memory of Stephon Clark
In Memory
In Memory
In Memory
In Memory

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Figure 9. This list "In Memory" of Black individuals who have been murdered by police and civilians concludes section six of *Citizen*. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis: Graywolf Press, 2014), 134. Image courtesy of Graywolf Press.

Rankine's visual poetics do not simply portray serialized encounters of anti-Black racism, they also look back at the hegemonic visual regimes of violence. hooks historicizes how controlling the gaze has been a means of asserting White supremacy, noting how enslaved Africans were "denied their right to gaze."[236] She argues that these restrictions create an irrepressible longing to look back: "Even in the worse circumstances of domination, the ability to manipulate one's gaze in the face of structures of domination that would contain it, opens up the possibility of agency."[237] While the control of vision and image has been a technology of White supremacy, hooks reminds us that power is never totalizing in its effects and that the gaze can be reversed to illuminate the fissures and cracks in hegemonic ways of seeing Blackness.

In the final move of this chapter, I look at a moment where the oppositional gaze and its Black feminist aesthetics are made explicit through *Citizen*'s visual poetics. In a poem that recalls a cutting moment where one friend says to another, "You are late, you nappy-headed ho," Rankine situates the friend's flippant use of a racist and sexist slur to a similar remark made by radio show host Don Imus's in 2007 about the Rutgers women's basketball team. In response to the language, the speaker wonders, "Maybe she wants to have a belated conversation about Don Imus and the women's basketball team he insulted with this language."[238] A photograph by Mike Segar of some of the members of the Scarlet Knights at a press conference cuts into the poem, interrupting it in medias res.[239] The imagistic interruption illustrates severity of this severing moment: "You both experience this cut,

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[236] bell hooks, *Black Looks: Race and Representation* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1992), 115.

[237] hooks, *Black Looks*, 116.

[238] Rankine, *Citizen*, 42.

[239] Rankine, *Citizen,* 41.

which she keeps insisting is a joke, a joke stuck in her throat, and like any other injury, you watch it rupture along its suddenly exposed suture."[240] The poem recognizes the injury of the language, which fundamentally ruptures the friendship.

The photograph draws attention to the "suddenly exposed suture"—the visible seam—of this moment and situates the wounding words within a larger political context. The photograph, taken by Mike Segar for a *Reuters* feature, shows five members of the Rutgers' women's basketball team at a public press conference that was held in response Imus's hate speech.[241] The *Reuters* article's opening lead reads, "The Rutgers University women's basketball team slammed Don Imus on Tuesday but plans to meet with the U.S. radio personality suspended for two weeks for calling them 'nappy-headed hos.'"[242] In their statements at the press conference, the women on the Rutgers basketball situate the comment within a larger framework of anti-Black sexism. Coach C. Vivian Stringer pointedly stated, "We have experienced racist and sexist remarks," calling the comments "despicable and abominable."[243] Stringer names Imus's comment exactly for what it is, racist and sexist, refusing to obscure the harm that has been done and recognizing that it is not singular but one of a litany that the team has endured. Essence Carson, the team captain at the time, calls for a dismantling of the misogynoir that pervades American culture, saying "We need to get to a point where we don't call women hos, we don't classify African American women as

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[240] Rankine, *Citizen*, 42.

[241] Jon Hurdle and Mike Segar, "Team to meet radio host Imus after race remark," *Reuters*, April 9, 2007, https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-race-imus/team-to-meet-radio-host-imus-after-race-remark-idUSN0934059220070410.

[242] Hurdle & Segar, "Team to meet radio host."

[243] Hurdle & Segar, "Team to meet radio host."

'nappy-headed hos.'"[244] Like Stringer, Carson notes not only the racism of Imus's statement but also the way that it relies on sexism as well, targeting African American women in a way that attempts to discipline and degrade their appearance.

Important to my analysis of Rankine's visual poetics is how this racism and sexism, or what Moya Bailey has termed *misogynoir*, is often compelled and inflected through visuality and through gendered and racialized ways of seeing, which Rankine's use of Segar's photograph illustrates. Misogynoir participates in a long genealogy of intersectional Black feminist thought and was originally coined and theorized by Bailey "to describe the anti-Black racist misogyny that Black women experience,"[245] Explaining the impetus behind coining misogynoir, Bailey says, "As a queer Black woman, I was struggling to find a way to talk about the racial visual violence I was seeing in popular culture throughout history."[246] Racial visual violence refers not only to controlling images of black women in popular media but also to the way that the gaze can be a means of racialized exclusion and oppression.[247] Rankine's incorporation of image, then, is a politicized aesthetic move that simultaneously lays bare these oppressive modes of seeing and stages an oppositional gaze through which to understand, critique, and look back at these violent visual regimes.

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[244] Hurdle & Segar, "Team to meet radio host."

[245] Moya Bailey & Trudy, "On misogynoir: citation, erasure, and plagiarism," *Feminist Media Studies*, 18:4 (2018): 762. I want to emphasize that "misogynoir" is a term coined by a queer Black woman and theorized and built collectively by Black (and predominantly queer and trans) women. The term participates in a long genealogy of drawing from lived experience to analyze how racism, sexism and cissexism, and heteronormativity collude.

[246] Bailey & Trudy, "On misogynoir," 762.

[247] Patricia Hill Collins theorizes four controlling images (the mammy, the matriarch, the jezebel, and the welfare queen) that contribute to black women's oppression. To be clear, these are not accurate depictions of Black women and their experiences, these are controlling, racist stereotypes that are meant to bely structural racism through the use of visual tropes and caricatures. See Patricia Hill Collins, *Black Feminist Thought: Knowledge, Consciousness, and the Politics of Empowerment* (New York: Routledge, 2000), 79-93.

I conclude by listening to the visual frequencies of Segar's photograph to locate an oppositional gaze not only in its frame but also within the visual poetics of Rankine's work. The photograph features five Black women in their red team jackets. They sit against a black backdrop, and a somewhat blurred red capital "R" sits in the foreground on the left edge of the image. The viewer's gaze is drawn to a woman's eyes near the center of the frame. She sits closest to the podium, and her face is turned to the unseen person standing behind it, who is outside of the photographic frame. Her gaze is firm, and her countenance suggests a critical skepticism, a look that troubles the polite aesthetics of the press conference and the public "apologies." Her gaze is echoed by the woman who sits at the end of the frame, along the right edge of the photograph. The three women who sit in the middle look out at their audience with looks of frustration, exhaustion, and resolve. These women, on a stage at a public press conference, stage hooks' oppositional gaze, performing a "critical black female spectatorship" that "emerges as a site of resistance only when individual black women actively resist the imposition of dominant ways of knowing and looking."[248] The women in the photograph look back to the invisible speaker behind the podium, to the audience of the news conference, to Imus and his racism, and to the viewer of the photograph. Individually and collectively, they refuse to be held by the controlling images of Black women that his statement relies on.

This chapter is bookended with public instances of Black women refusing to perform compliant citizenship, rejecting the polite racism and sexism that surrounds them, and using their gaze to forge an alternative visual poetics and politics. Throughout *Citizen*, Rankine incorporates a variety of visual media to examine how ways of seeing, or not seeing,

[248] hooks, *Black Looks*, 128.

construct racial fantasies and delineate boundaries of belonging, national and otherwise. The interruption and eruption of image in her work reveals citizenship as emergent through a troubling field of vision that marks some bodies as natural and invisible and others as particular and hypervisible. These images act as visual hyperlinks that, by interrupting the spatio-temporality of the page, challenge the coherence of the category of citizen, revealing its inconsistencies and contradictions. Ultimately, Rankine's visual poetics creates Black feminist poetics, poethics, and politics of seeing citizenship. Rather than seeking inclusion within the category of citizen, one fundamentally founded on anti-Black exclusion, *Citizen* resists and returns its gaze to craft an imminent political vision for a future of collective liberation.

Chapter Three

"We can be whole—just differently": Mapping Deborah Miranda's Mosaic Forms

One has only to walk down the streets of downtown Santa Barbara, California, or stroll through its residential neighborhoods to be reminded of the area's colonial history. Adobe facades and terracotta tiled roofs adorn malls, homes, and city buildings, paying homage to the fact that Santa Barbara is home to one of the California's twenty-one Franciscan missions. Beginning in the 1920s Santa Barbara began widely implementing the "Spanish Colonial Revival style" of architecture, which continues to serve as a contemporary design template for the city. As recently as 2020, the City of Santa Barbara Planning Division claimed that "the Spanish Colonial Revival is a well-known and loved architectural style in Santa Barbara."[249] These architectural and visual celebrations of the missions are not necessarily unique to Santa Barbara but are endemic up and down the coastline of what is now called California. As Lee M. Panich argues, these reminders "serve to anchor the European history of the region while simultaneously marking the passing of local indigenous groups into a mythical past."[250] This "well-loved" style of architecture, modeled off of the missions, is just one example of how California's Spanish "heritage" is mobilized to erase colonial violence past and present and the contemporary presence of Indigenous peoples,[251]

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[249] City of Santa Barbara Planning Division, "Draft Objective Design Standards for Processing of Streamlined Housing Projects," May 6, 2022, https://www.santabarbaraca.gov/SBdocuments/Advisory_Groups/Historic_Landmarks_Commission/Archive/2020_Archives/04_Staff_Reports/2020-05-13_May_13_2020_Item_1_Objective_Design_Standards_Staff_Report.pdf.

[250] Lee M. Panich, "After Saint Serra: Unearthing indigenous histories at the California missions," *Journal of Social Archaeology* 16, no. 2 (2016): 239.

[251] I use "Indigenous" and "Native" peoples interchangeably in this chapter as opposed to "Native American" or "American Indian." I use "Indigenous" and "Native" peoples to connote that they are the original inhabitants of land that the US now occupies. I use "Native American" when referring to when the field of Native American and Indigenous Studies. While some Indigenous people and scholars continue to use the language of "Native American" or "American Indian," as a non-Native scholar I choose not to use them because

in the case of Santa Barbara the Coastal Band of the Chumash Nation. The Spanish missions were part of a colonial system of racialized capitalism and genocidal violence, where the financial gain of the Spanish crown and the Catholic church was funded through Indigenous lives and labor.[252] The celebratory mythologies surrounding the Spanish missions bespeak a resistance to seeing how settler colonialism continues to contour California's specific geographies and those of the wider US nation state. These architectural recollections of the Spanish missions, then, serve a public amnesia that forgets the present realities of US settler colonialism through a calculated remembering and rewriting of the history of Spanish colonialism.

At the same time, this celebratory narrative of the city's colonial history—commemorated through architecture, street signs, and festivals—is not the only history that animates the area. Local Chumash activists have persistently asserted their presence, claiming Santa Barbara as an Indigenous place first and foremost and resisting its settler geographies. Seeds to Forest Defense, for instance, an autonomous and coalitional movement of "Chumash, BIPOC, and white accomplices," centers Indigenous Traditional Ecological

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of the ways that they linguistically align Indigenous peoples with the US nation state and/or define them by colonial misperceptions. When possible, I try to be specific and identify people with the Native affiliations that they themselves claim. Some of the Indigenous scholars I engage embrace "Indian," such as Miranda who refers to "California Mission Indians." I quote her language directly but choose not to replicate it in my own analysis as a non-Native scholar. I only use "Indian" in quotation marks and when referring to the stereotypical stock image of Indigeneity that exists with the US cultural and visual imagination. The shifting terminology around Indigeneity illustrates language as a locus where colonial power relations are constructed and contested.

[252] Miranda traces the history of the Spanish missions in the area, saying: "In 1976, after missionizing much of Mexico, the Spaniards began to move up the west coast of North America in order to establish claims to rich resources and land before other European nations could get a foothold. Together, the Franciscan priests and Spanish soldiers 'built' a series of twenty-one missions along what is now coastal California. (California's Indigenous peoples, numbering over one million at the time, did most of the actual labor.) These missions, some rehabilitated from melting adobe, others in near-original state, are now one of the state's biggest tourist attractions." Deborah Miranda, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* (Berkeley: Heyday, 2013), xvi-xvii. While the missions were undoubtedly sites of European colonial violence, scholars and activists have also pointed out that the demographic and material realities of the missions make them Indigenous places of struggle and survival. See Panich, "After Saint Serra."

Knowledge to support decolonial land protection and landback movements.[253] In spring of 2022, they helped raise money to bail out and support arrested landback activists who were trying to prevent private, corporate development of one hundred acres of Native grasslands in Santa Barbara's San Marcos Foothills and were an integral part of a larger movement to raise over $18.6 million to purchase the land to permanently protect it for Chumash use and educational opportunities. Chumash activist have also petitioned to change the names of various Santa Barbara streets, many of which are named after Catholic saints and priests (read Catholic colonizers), successfully changing "Indio Muerto Street" to "Hutash Street," the name of a Chumash harvest festival and a grain seed, in 2020.[254] Recognizing the representational and material power of the Mission, Chumash activists have also used it as site of visual protest, beheading a statue of Saint Junipero Serra and splashing red-paint reminders that the mission was a place of "rape" and "genocide" and to "never forget the lives + land stolen."[255] These actions are not symbolic gestures: they use various forms of protest (redistribution, education, political, visual/performative) to unsettle settler spatial relations. They participate in a larger movement of decolonization that, as Unangax̂ scholar Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang urge, "must involve the repatriation of land simultaneous to

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[253] seedstoforestdefense, "Bio," *Instagram*. Accessed May 5, 2022, https://www.instagram.com/seedstoforestdefense/?hl=en.

[254] Nick Welsh, "Santa Barbara's Indio Muerto Street to Be Changed," *Santa Barbara Independent*, September 20, 2020, https://www.independent.com/2020/09/30/santa-barbaras-indio-muerto-street-to-be-changed/.

[255] Hannah Fry, "Vandals splatter Old Mission Santa Barbara with red paint, misspell 'genocide' message," *Los Angeles Times*, October 10, 2018, https://www.latimes.com/local/lanow/la-me-ln-old-mission-vandalism-20181010-story.html. I want to make clear that I do not consider these acts of "vandalism" but acts of protest against the criminal violence of settler colonialism.

the recognition of how land and relations to land have always been differently understood and enacted."[256]

Chumash and Ohlone Costanoan Esselen author and scholar Deborah Miranda enters into these vexed geographies to unearth and participate in this genealogy of Indigenous resistance across Native California.[257] Her multimedia memoir, *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, interweaves her personal narrative as what she calls a "mixed-blood 'Mission Indian'" with California's long history of colonialism: first under the Spanish mission system, then Mexican secularization and control, and finally the US settler colonial nation state. [258] In it, she blends word and image—collaging original art, personal and archival photographs, drawings and cartoons, letters, newspaper clippings, and historical documents with her own poetry and prose. These remnants reveal how settler colonialism makes itself

[256] Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang, "Decolonization is not a metaphor," *Decolonization: Indigeneity, Education, & Society* 1, no. 1 (2012): 7. While Tuck and Yang's essay argues that settler colonialism relies on a "settler-native-slave triad," Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino argue that the essay actually erases and collapses the experiences of enslaved people and their descendants and positions anti-Blackness as derivative, rather than essential, to the settler colonial paradigm. See Tapji Garba and Sara-Maria Sorentino, "Slavery is a Metaphor: A Critical Commentary on Eve Tuck and K. Wayne Yang's 'Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," *Antipode* 52, no. 3 (2020): 764-782. In this chapter, I draw out the ways that Miranda's work illustrates how settler colonialism and anti-Black racism work in distinct yet intersecting ways to uphold racial and colonial capitalism. Miranda's multiracial memoir and its mosaic aesthetics illuminates some ways to theorize cross-racial coalitions that work to dismantle the twin logics of White supremacy and settler colonialism that buttress the US nation state.

[257] It is protocol within Native American and Indigenous Studies to note specific tribal or national affiliation. Rather than include this information in parentheticals, I have chosen to integrate it into the sentence to emphasize the importance of these affiliations, attachments, and geographies to the intellectual genealogies I trace. Affiliation is a complicated topic within Native American and Indigenous Studies and history. Within California's specific context, few Native nations that were impacted by the Spanish mission system have federal recognition today. There has been a larger movement on the part of Native nations across California to petition for federal recognition in order to secure claims to territory and self-governance. Yet, as San Luis Rey Band of Mission Indians scholar Olivia Chilcote emphasizes, these petitions were often unsuccessful and "revealed the extent to which Native American tribes are still bound to the authority of the federal government, an artifact of a long legacy of colonial practices in the United States." See Olivia Chilcote, "'Time Out of Mind': The San Luis Rey Band of Mission Indians and the Historical Origins of a Struggle for Federal Recognition," *California History* 96, no. 4 (2019): 39.

[258] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xiv. Miranda later describes herself as "half white, half Indian, mixed with Mexican and Jewish tribes." Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 123.

material through visual and print cultures. Maya Mikdashi, a Lebanese scholar of Chippewa ancestry, argues that settler colonialism perpetuates itself through "the proliferation of documents and bureaucracy":

> It is opening a locked suitcase and finding papers, land allotments, and photos of relatives you have never seen. It is exploring these photos, wondering about the names of the people in them, knowing that even if you knew those names you would not know how to pronounce them or understand their meaning. It is understanding that these family documents and photos could be in a museum; there they would be made to tell a story outside the twinned nature of nation building and genocide.[259]

Mikdashi notes how this trail of documentation traces the legacy of settler colonial practices while also leading to unknown histories and narratives. These documents are simultaneously tucked away in locked suitcases and put on display at museums, where they are manipulated into a nationalistic narrative that at best ignores and at worst justifies the genocidal project of settler colonialism. Historically, museums (and universities) have stolen, studied, and paraded pieces of Indigenous life and culture, including human remains, as objects of curiosity or study.[260] Luiseño, Puyukitchum, Ipai, and Mexican-American artist James Luna puts these colonial ways of seeing on display in his performance art in which he, like

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[259] Maya Mikdashi, "What Is Settler Colonialism? (for Leo Delano Ames Jr.)," *American Indian Culture and Research Journal* 37, 2 (2013): 31.

[260] The University of California, Berkeley, holds one of the largest collections of Indigenous human remains and sacred objects, for instance. The University of California still holds Indigenous remains and sacred objects and only announced a repatriation policy in 2021. In one of the most famous examples, a Yahi man who was captured by White settler militias near Oroville, CA, in 1911 and called Ishi (Yahi for "man") was publicized as "the last wild Indian in California" and brought to the University of California Museum of Anthropology, which was then located in San Francisco. When he died in 1916, after living the remainder of his life there, University of California doctors removed his brain for study and later sent it to the Smithsonian. Ishi's ashes and brain were not repatriated, reunited, and buried until 2000 and then only after the work of Maidu, Redding, and Pitt River activists. See "Ishi," *Phoebe A. Hearst Museum of Anthropology*, https://hearstmuseum.berkeley.edu/ishi/. Miranda creates a found poem for Ishi in *Bad Indians* called "Ishi at Large" and discusses him multiple times in the book. See Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 46, 54, and 134 for discussions of Ishi. See also "Native American Cultural Affiliation and Repatriation (NAGPRA) Policy," University of California, December 22, 2021, https://www.ucop.edu/research-policy-analysis-coordination/policies-guidance/curation-and-repatriation/#:~:text=The%20University%20is%20committed%20to,its%20accompanying%20regulations%2C%20and%20CalNAGPRA.

Miranda, satirically turns the colonial gaze against itself. In his 1987 *Artifact Piece*, which he performed at the Museum of Man in Balboa Park, San Diego, he parodies these ethnographic practices by putting himself, nearly naked, on display.[261] Like Luna, Miranda collects, curates, and collages the detritus of colonial and national archives to parody their ways of seeing and, ultimately, to tell a different story, a counternarrative, of California's Indigenous peoples.

Through her curation of these archival fragments, Miranda critiques the visual mythologies that cohere around what she refers to as the "Mission Fantasy Fairy Tale."[262] In the US and North America more broadly, these visual mythologies take a few distinct yet interconnected routes. First, they aestheticize and valorize the violence of settler colonialism. Second, they attempt to erase Indigeneity by portraying Indigenous peoples as always already part of a vanishing past. Third, they create ahistorical, romanticized images of authentic Indigeneity that are devoid of national, cultural, and temporal specificity and, thus, can easily be appropriated. Miranda engages with all three threads throughout *Bad Indians*, yet she directly targets the Mission décor that "drenches Southern California" in the book's introduction, where she says, "Along with this visual mythology of adobe and red clay roof tiles comes the cultural storytelling that drains the missions of their brutal and bloody pasts for popular consumption."[263]

Miranda crafts her memoir as a satirical impersonation of one the most prevalent and pervasive forms of cultural and visual storytelling that sustains these mission mythologies,

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[261] See Ellen C. Caldwell, "How Luiseno Indian Artist James Luna Resists Cultural Appropriation," *JSTOR Daily*, December 25, 2015, https://daily.jstor.org/native-disruptions-with-artist-james-luna/.

[262] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xix.

[263] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xvii.

the "Mission Unit/Project," proclaiming *Bad Indians* as her own "belated offering" to the project.[264] The Mission Unit continues to be part of California's standard public curriculum throughout fourth grade classrooms, and until 2016, students were required to build models of one of the state's twenty-one Spanish missions as part of this unit. While this project, which asks students to create showy dioramas of sites of genocide, is no longer required, it has not been banned either and continues to be used by instructors.[265] This curriculum, argues Anne Mai Yee Jansen, "presents young California schoolchildren with a colonial map (both cartographic and metaphoric) of California that glorifies the Missions—outposts of Spanish Catholic colonial rule—and erases the presence and value of the Indigenous peoples of California."[266]

Tonawanda Band of Seneca scholar Mishuana Goeman argues that the maps are essential to colonial and imperial projects of nation building, and that the process of mapping Indigenous peoples and land continues in the contemporary moment.[267] Maps are a visual representation of territorial power, and while contemporary Western maps have moved away from the visual iconography and ornamentation of earlier maps, they continue to operate

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[264] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xvii.

[265] I very recently came across an Instagram post where someone had posted their niece's diorama, which shows how the project continues to persist both in the classroom and in the popular discourses and visual imagination around the missions and their histories.

[266] Anne Mai Yee Jansen, "Erasure Is a Bitch, Isn't It?: Deborah Miranda's Feminist Geographies and Native Women's Life Writing," *Studies in American Indian Literature* 33, no. 1-2 (Spring-Summer 2021): 57.

[267] While Goeman's work explores Canada and the United States, she emphasizes the importance of theorizing junctions of colonial power across the Americas, even as we must attend to the particularities and differences therein. As Goeman points out, "Many [US] Native nations' traditional homelands spread into what is now known as Canada and Mexico [. . .] The settler nation-states of the Americas, in recognizing one another's boundaries and overlooking colonial violence, legitimate the settler state as an entity while overlooking the injustices toward Native people under its guise of the affairs of a sovereign nation." I explore how national borders inflict colonial violence on both Indigenous people and racialized Latinx immigrants within the U.S. nation state in the fourth chapter of this dissertation. Mishuana Goeman, *Mark My Words: Native Women Mapping Our Nations* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 21.

through what Ryan Eichberger calls a "cartographic vision" that includes and excludes through "mathematically precise gridlines, bar scales, rhumb lines, and topographic hachure."[268] Goeman further explains maps' visual function when explains how bodies "articulate differently in different spaces," arguing:

> As Native bodies travel through various geographies, they are read differently and thus experience lived realities that are constantly shifting. [. . .] For Indigenous people traveling through constructed colonial and imperial spaces, the body can be hypervisible as the abnormal body, and at times hyper-invisible as it becomes spatially disjointed from the map of the nation in both physical and mental imaginings.[269]

Maps not only attempt to lay claim to the territory they represent, but they also visually circumscribe the people within that space, marking some for inclusion within the mental imagination of the nation and others for exclusion. Maps' cartographic divisions circumscribe how Indigenous people move about and navigate colonial and imperial constructions of space. At the same time, Goeman argues that Indigenous storytelling, through both oral and literary traditions, has been a means of (re)mapping these settler colonial cartographies and affirming Indigenous spatial epistemologies.[270] "These mental maps found in stories," Goeman argues, "shape relationships around us and serve to imagine identity and community differently."[271]

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[268] Ryan Eichberger, "Maps, Silence, and Standing Rock: Seeking a Visuality for the Age of Environmental Crisis," *Communication Design Quarterly* (April 2019): 11.

[269] Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 12.

[270] Goeman uses (re)mapping with parentheticals to grammatically represent the cultural connections within Native women's reconstructions of geography, the way they draw on traditional Indigenous knowledge and dominant discourses to make their literary representation of spatial concepts. See Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 213 fn2. I too use parenthetical around the verbs (re)map, (re)read, and (re)contextualize to show how Miranda blends multiple visual and verbal discourses from both Indigenous and colonial perspectives to create a literary contact zone.

[271] Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 25.

Bad Indians harnesses the spatial and relational power of storytelling.[272] Rather than simply doing away with "the story of the missionization of California," Miranda uses every tool available to create a new mental map of California and its Indigenous peoples past, present, and future in her multimedia memoir.[273] If maps are a visual (re)production of space, then Miranda strategically uses visual culture to (re)map the colonial mythologies that have cohered to California and its place within the national imagination as a symbol of US colonial expansion and exceptionalism. By taking the leftovers of colonial narratives and national mythologies and collaging them with her own personal narrative and the collective histories of California Indigenous peoples, Miranda creates a multimedia landscape that interweaves disparate and at times conflicting archival fragments to create a new narrative and image of Indigeneity, one that is not monolithic but rather a mosaic. Through this mosaic, Miranda maps new terrains of Indigenous identity, collectivity, and their futures.

In an effort to theorize Miranda's mosaic form without losing the specific textures of its individual pieces, I look the memoir's visual fragments to trace the aesthetic and cultural work of *Bad Indians*' visual form. First, I examine how the book critiques federal frameworks of recognition and belonging by remixing the paper trail of these colonial equations—BIA blood quantum charts. Then, I analyze the relationship between two different types of visual mediums, photography and drawing, in the book to explore the gendered and racialized dynamics of settler colonial power structures and visual regimes. Finally, I look to the way that Miranda collages personal family photographs with poetry and prose to situate her own personal genealogy within the longer history of settler colonialism

[272] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xiv.

[273] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xvi.

and Indigenous survivance. Only after zooming in on specific images and visual forms, can we zoom out to understand how the mosaic form collects the fragments, both discursive and material, that settler colonialism leaves in its ongoing wake and fits their jagged edges into a new image of belonging, not one that is founded on a multiculturalist monolith that erases difference but one that can theorize the inter-generational, multi-racial realities of contemporary Indigenous peoples in a post-colonial world.[274]

Remixing Blood Quantum & National Boundaries of Belonging

As I did in the previous chapter, I look to *Bad Indians*' cover image as an announcement of its visual poetics and politics. The cover image, taken from one of Miranda's own childhood photographs, shows a young Miranda "playing cowboy"—complete with a red hat and a leather vest and chaps adorned with images of cowboys and horses—smiling and straddling a bored looking horse. The image performs and parodies the popular iconography of the so-called "wild West" but with an unexpected twist. Here, an "Indian" plays at being a cowboy; the juxtaposition of the title *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir* and the cover image redirects and reverses the way that the colonial gaze has position Indigenous peoples and their cultures as vanishing relics of the past appropriated for play and entertainment. The unexpected and, perhaps, uncomfortable difference calls attention to and critiques the cowboy mythos that surrounds the US West and has long sustained national expansion and exclusion.

The inside cover continues this visual lampooning of how the US nation state has attempted to appropriate Indigeneity to further colonial agendas (see Fig. 10). The inside cover features four images of "Things You Can Do with Your Chart for Calculating

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[274] My use of post-colonial is drawn from Miranda's own work, who describes her memoir a "Post-Colonial Art Project" that she has inherited. By using it, I do not presume that colonialism has ended or is a thing of the past but recognize that we are in a moment of ongoing settler colonial violence. See Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 136.

Quantum of Indian Blood." It takes images that have been associated with colonial control, BIA blood quantum charts, and uses them as a canvas of critique. Blood quantum is a framework for federal recognition and tribal enrollment that emerged in response to the 1887 Dawes Act, or the General Allotment Act, a piece of assimilationist legislation that allowed the US government to break up land that had previously been held and inhabited collectively by Native Nations and to disperse or allot it to their individual members. The federal government then took the remaining land and sold it to non-Native settlers. "Calculating the Quantum of Indian Blood," as the charts claim, becomes a means of demarcating tribal enrollment or citizenship, codifying relationships to the federal government, and redistributing land. By delineating these boundaries of belonging, the paradigm of blood quantum attempts to take sovereignty and self-determination away from Native Nations and to put it in the hands of the federal government. The BIA charts and the pseudo-scientific paradigm of blood quantum they represent work through what Patrick Wolfe identifies as settler colonialism's "logic of elimination" that attempts to eliminate Indigenous peoples and their cultures in order to assert settler colonizers as the rightful inhabitants of the land they have stolen.[275] The charts' fractioning of blood mimics the division and dispossession of land: the collective parceled out into tiny squares.

[275] Patrick Wolfe, "Settler colonialism and the elimination of the native," *Journal of Genocide Research* 8, no. 4 (2006): 387. Decolonial scholars have connected this logic of elimination to the role of racial capitalism in Western modernity. While it shares the "patterns of extermination, pillage, enslavement, racialization, dehumanization, and power" of classical colonization, Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh maintain that settler colonialism has adapted to become a fundamentally genocidal project that seeks to displace Indigenous inhabitants and expropriate their lands for national and capitalist expansion. Walter D. Mignolo and Catherine E. Walsh, *On Decoloniality: Concepts, Analytics, Praxis* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2018), 16. Tuck and Yang also not that "Settler colonialism is different from other forms of colonialism in that settlers come with the intention of making a new home on the land, a homemaking that insists on settler sovereignty over all things in their new domain." Tuck and Yang, "Decolonization is Not a Metaphor," 5.

While they are not maps per se, the blood quantum charts work through what Sisseton Wahpeton Oyate scholar Kim TallBear recognizes as the "promises of scientific precision."[276] Blood quantum determinations are not based on any scientific truths or biological sciences. Instead, as TallBear maintains, they "have been based upon fractions enumerated on paper by bureaucratic agents of both state and tribes [. . .] Blood quantum is a materialist practice only to the extent that it involves paperwork."[277] The BIA blood quantum charts pictured in Miranda's *Bad Indians* turns the very logic of these bureaucratic papers against itself, as it rearticulates their meaning by drawing over their pseudo-scientific lines with bright-colored crayon and by questioning their presumed authority with satirical, rhetorical captions. Miranda's materialist aesthetic form turns the paper trail of federal policy into a locus of visual critique. For example, the third blood quantum chart, titled "Patriotism Percentages," that adorns the back inside cover illustrates how these numbers, by attempting to deterritorialize Indigenous identity, reterritorialize US national identity (see Fig. 10). It probes, "Why is blood quantum so important to the US Government? It must be a measure of Indian patriotism." Just as Miranda cajoles readers to "Create a flag that expresses [their] patriotism," she selectively fills in the squares of the chart with blue and red to create an approximation of the US flag.[278] While Miranda does not embrace patriotic attachments to the US nation state, she recognizes how the blood quantum charts attempt not only to circumscribe Indigenous identity and self-determination but also to (re)contextualize it within federal frameworks of recognition and citizenship.

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[276] Kim TallBear, *Native American DNA: Tribal Belonging and the False Promise of Genetic Science* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013), 27.

[277] TallBear, *Native American DNA*, 54.

[278] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, inside back cover.

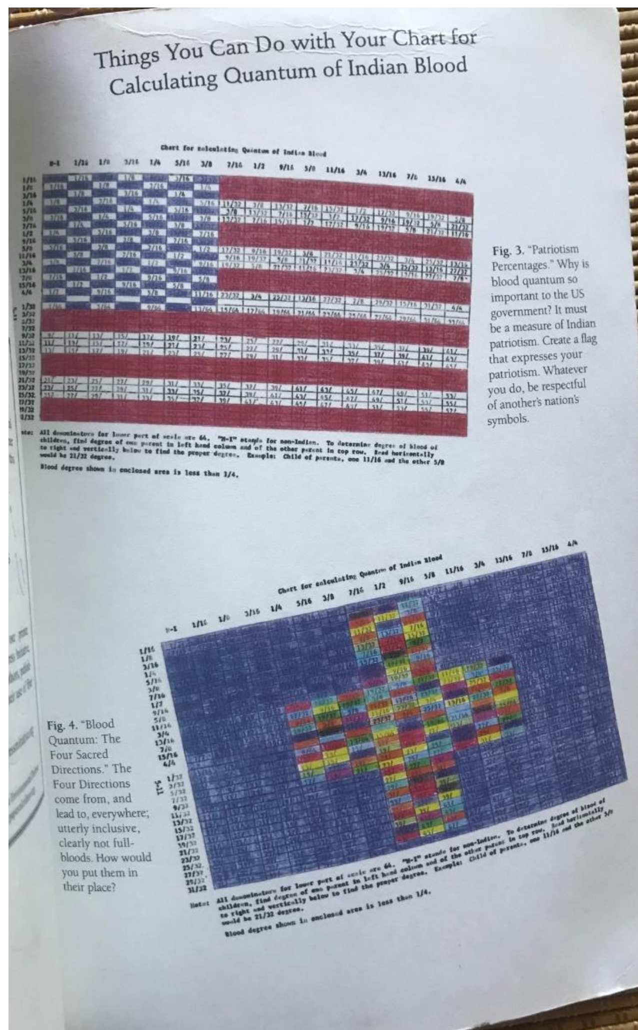

Figure 10. "Things You Can Do with Your Chart for Calculating Quantum of Indian Blood" from the inside back cover of *Bad Indians*. Image and text from *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, © 2013 by Deborah A. Miranda, published by Heyday.

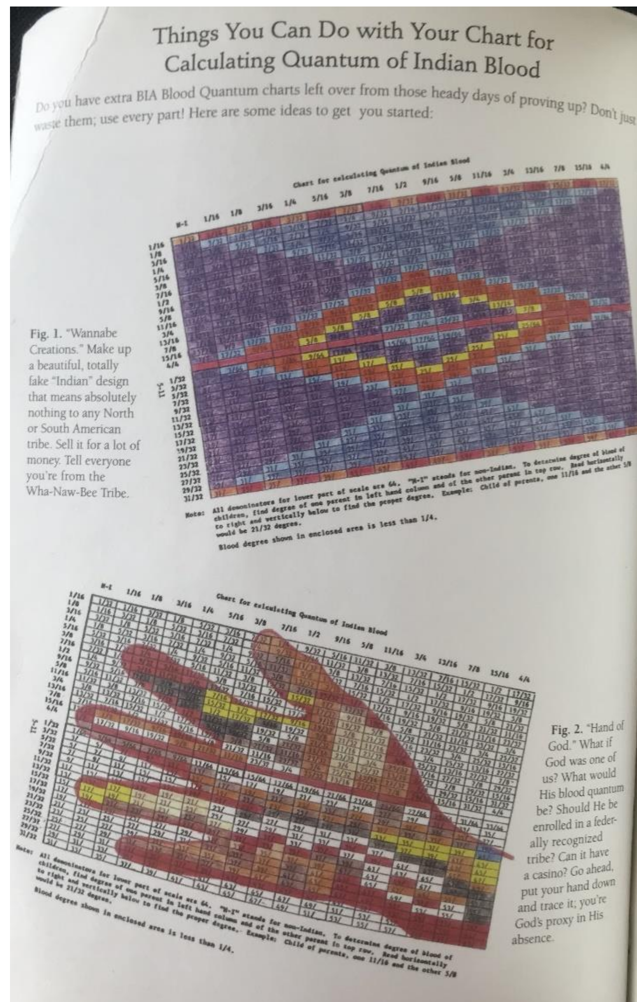

Figure 11. "Things You Can Do with Your Chart for Calculating Quantum of Indian Blood" from the inside front cover of *Bad Indians*. Image and text from *Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, © 2013 by Deborah A. Miranda, published by Heyday.

The inside cover frames the creative and critical project of Miranda's blood quantum charts by asking, "Do you have extra BIA Blood Quantum charts left over from those heady days of proving up?" and then suggesting, "Don't just waste them; use every part! Here are some ideas to get you started" (see Fig. 11).[279] Refusing the chart's false rhetoric of inclusion, Miranda calls them out as tools of "proving up," or proving authenticity. Cherokee

[279] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, inside front cover.

author and scholar Thomas King connects these authenticity tests to literary and visual trope of "the Indian," an image of "a single heroic Indian (male, of course)" that emerges out of the nineteenth century.[280] King and other Native and Indigenous Studies scholars strategically use "the Indian" to critique romanticized figurations that fix Indigenous peoples in a no-longer present past at the expense of what King calls "Indians" *plural*, real Indigenous peoples and their present-day lived experiences.[281] He notes the way that Indigeneity, a category that is distinct from race but has historically been racialized, challenges fixed notions of identity: "in the absence of visual confirmation these 'touchstones'—race, culture, language, blood—still form a kind of authenticity test, a racial-reality game that contemporary Native people are forced to play."[282] Miranda understands the terms of these games all too well. The inside cover satirically imitates an activity or craft book that, rather than playing along with the rules of blood quantum, invites those with leftover charts to create play their own games. The first of Miranda's remixed blood quantum charts, titled "Wannabe Creations," encourages viewers to "Make up a beautiful, totally fake 'Indian' design that means absolutely nothing to any North or South American Tribe. Sell it for a lot of money. Tell everyone you're from the Wha-Naw-Bee Tribe."[283] The colorful image of a 'totally fake 'Indian design" visually satirizes the conflict between the figure of "the Indian" within the settler colonial imagination, one that was forged largely through literary and visual

[280] Thomas King, *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2005), 33.

[281] King, *The Truth About Stories*, 53.

[282] King, *The Truth About Stories*, 55.

[283] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, inside front cover.

cultures, and the embodied presence of Indigenous peoples.[284] The visual poetics of the page poke fun at the visual stereotypes that circumscribe Indigenous identity within American culture and reveal those moments of misrecognition as opportunities to playfully redirect colonial power relations.

The second chart on the inside cover, titled "Hand of God," points out the ideology of "manifest destiny"—the belief that the U.S. had a divine right to expand Westward—that undergirds the blood quantum charts (see Fig. 11). The caption turns that cliché question, "What if God was one of us?" in on itself.[285] Here, the *us* reads not as a universalizing claim that presumes Whiteness, as it so often does, but insinuatingly suggests, "What if God was Indigenous?" a question that fundamentally troubles the presumed rights of White settlers. The caption goes on to probe, "What would His blood quantum be? Should He be enrolled in a federally recognized tribe?" These questions challenge readers to consider how federal frameworks of recognition, such as blood quantum, do not confer the rights of citizenship but, instead, create a "field of power through which colonial relations are produced and maintained," as Yellowknives Dene scholar Glen Sean Clouthard argues.[286]

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[284] This notion of the cultural appropriation and commodification of Indigenous "authenticity" reemerges later in the memoir when Miranda cites a cartoon by Tongva and Ajachmem artist L. Frank titled "California Pow Wow." In this image, Frank's coyote character sells "missionart" for $29.95 out of a booth sponsored by "Mission Tours Inc." The verbal labeling and captions of Frank's work are all backward, a fun home mirror image that reflects the gross distortion of Indigenous cultures by curious settlers. See Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 192 for L. Frank cartoon and L. Frank, *Acorn Soup* (Berkeley: Heyday, 1999). The 1491s, a sketch comedy group of "indigenous misfits" based in "the wooded ghettos of Minnesota and the buffalo grass of Oklahoma," also use media and visual culture to satirize the commodification and appropriation of Indigenous cultures in their sketch "The Indian Store." See The 1491s, "Home" and "Who We Are," *1491s*, http://www.1491s.com/ and The 1491s, "The Indian Store," *YouTube* video, 00:03:57, December 23, 2013, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NuzPoidV4nI&t=67s.

[285] Some might recognize it from Joan Osborne's 1995 song "One of Us," which later became the opening anthem of the television drama *Joan of Arcadia* (2003-2005).

[286] Glen Sean Clouthard, *Red Skin, White Masks: Rejecting the Colonial Politics of Recognition* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2014), 17.

Attending to the visual specificity of these images underscores the way that these images work within and beyond the confines of the blood quantum charts. While the "fake 'Indian' design" that adorns the chart titled "Wannabe Creations" creates a symmetrical geometric pattern. The "Hand of God" image takes a more organic shape. The curved lines and colors imagine the "Hand of God" as a human hand, and the lines of the thumb and the wrist bleed off the page. The "bleed," a term I take from comics studies, refers to an image that breaks or is not contained by a border or panel but, instead, extends off the edge of the page; the bleed provides an apt framework for reading the structural and embodied violence of the blood quantum charts. The bleeding lines and the vibrant colors of the hand push against the crude calculations that seek to constrain it, and as they extend off the chart, they extend to the reader an opportunity for identification or, perhaps, disidentification. The caption concludes by inviting readers to "Go ahead put your hand down and trace it; you're God's proxy in his absence."[287] Miranda's tongue-in-cheek statement, "you're God's proxy," comments on the twisted self-aggrandizing logic of manifest destiny through which White settlers play God. At the same time, however, the invitation to trace one's hand pulls the positionality of the reader into the historicity of the text. Miranda constructs her memoir not as some sacred text, a tool of missionization or evangelization, but instead as a sacrilegious work of art that invites readers into a more critical perspective on the print and visual cultures that perpetuate settler colonialism by feigning inclusion.

Citizenship does not map easily onto Indigenous peoples and communities, as it has been a category that the federal government has wielded to circumscribe Indigenous identity, kinship, self-determination, sovereignty, and land claims. As further example of this, "In

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[287] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, inside front cover.

1924 American Indians were unilaterally declared citizens of the United States, ushering in a long period of 'termination'" that allowed the US to officially dissolve and incorporate Native Nations without their consent, as Robert Nichols traces. [288] The compulsory enfranchisement of Indigenous people, Nichols argues, was an effort "to absorb indigeneity altogether and make it disappear within a few generations."[289] Citizenship serves a dual pedagogical function first to mark difference along lines of race, class, gender, sexuality, and civility and, second, to erase such distinctions in service of the settler colonial state.[290]

Like maps, the blood quantum charts imagine and materialize colonial enterprises through a similar use of plotting points on static one-dimension plane that cannot help but to flatten the lived realities of Indigenous peoples, turning their heterogeneity into a monolithic image. When people do not measure up to these imposed standards of purity, they are erased from the representational plane, yet the delineations of blood quantum have also worked outside these intended federal erasures. TallBear traces the shifting uses of blood quantum to underscore how Indigenous peoples have used the "semiotics of blood" to rearticulate their identities

> Where the federal policy project of the nineteenth century was to *de*tribalize, what has happened in effect is a rearticulated tribalization of Native Americans in blood fractions and through bloodlines. A key mechanism meant to dilute Indians out of existence has reconfigured them and, in the particular form of lineal descent, propagates them. If the material properties of blood—the red fluid itself—are no longer legitimate for the study of race, symbolic blood remains very much at play in twenty-first century sociopolitical formations of the Indian. The complex semiotics of

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[288] Robert Nichols, *Theft is Property!: Dispossession and Critical Theory* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 3.

[289] Robert Nichols, "Contract and Usurpation: Enfranchisement and Racial Governance in Settler-Colonial Contexts," in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. by Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 106.

[290] Nichols, "Contract and Usurpation," 106-207.

> blood must be understood if we are to gauge the opportunities and barriers for Native American DNA to shift the boundaries of race, tribe, and indigeneity.[291]

Miranda's remixed blood quantum charts reflect the creative ways that Indigenous peoples have worked within and against federal frameworks of recognition and belonging to articulate alternative identitarian and national formations. These cover images are not paratextual but rather fundamental instantiations of Miranda's mosaic form in practice, taking the leftover material traces and visual cultures of settler colonialism and reorganizing them into both a critique of federal frameworks of recognition and an alternative formation of identification and belonging.

In an interview, Miranda discusses her artistic process with the blood quantum charts, saying:

> Those were charts that had been sent to my mom from the BIA [Bureau of Indian Affairs] when she wrote to them when I was about 12 asking, "How can I help my daughter prepare for college and get some scholarships?" They sent her back these blank charts and said, "Fill these in." And so I sat down with them and started coloring them in. That became my response to the controversy and the trauma that is blood quantums for Native identity.[292]

Miranda does not simply fill the charts in; she embraces the genre of the children's activity book that she parodies to remix and reformulate the narrow images of Indigeneity they represent. The blood quantum charts anticipate and model the mosaic qualities of the entire memoir. Through visual and verbal satire, the blood quantum charts show citizenship not to be a natural or benevolent category of belonging but one that is, for many and especially for Indigenous peoples, controversial and traumatic and demands creative reinvention. Rather

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[291] TallBear, *Native American DNA*, 47.

[292] Deborah Miranda, "Deborah A Miranda on Mixing Genres to Confront Cultural Trauma," interview by Parrish Turner, *The Culture Trip*, August 24, 2018, https://theculturetrip.com/north-america/usa/california/articles/deborah-miranda-on-mixing-genres-to-confront-cultural-trauma/.

than seeking inclusion within their confining boxes, Miranda remixes their contents through her do-it-yourself aesthetics to redraw their boundaries of belonging.

Listening to the Mission Belles/Bells

In its (re)mapping of these boundaries, *Bad Indians* is attentive to the particular ways that settler colonial geographies impose themselves on women and queer, trans, and Two-Spirit people. Miranda is a queer woman author who speaks of her own experiences with sexual and gender-based violence in the memoir. She interweaves stories of Indigenous women she has encountered in the archive with her own personal narrative to examine how sexual and gender-based violence are tools of deeply patriarchal colonial epistemologies and power structures. As Goeman argues, "Colonization resulted in a sorting of space based on ideological premises of hierarchies and binaries, and Indigenous women did not fare well in these systems of inequity;" settler colonialism continues to depend on these "naturalizing geographic concepts and sets of social relations."[293] The visual cultures of settler colonialism, such as ethnographic drawings or postcard photographs, were circulated to naturalize these hierarchies and to fix Indigenous women into stereotypical images that relied on misogynistic, racist, and colonialist tropes. These images were then circulated across the nation and, thus, mapped the US's visual imagination of Indigenous peoples.

Miranda addresses how settler colonialism's visual cultures trade in sexist and racist discourses in a vignette titled "Digger Belles."[294] The section explores the history of this

[293] Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 2.

[294] Because this term is a racist and colonialist epithet, I represent it only once in this text, the first time I use it and directly quoted within Miranda's own words. As a non-Native scholar of settler genealogy, I have chosen not to reproduce the word and its discursive and material violence on the page, even when using direct quotations, and I will represent it as D----r. I have included it in this first instance because the term itself and its history is less well-known than other racial epithets, which speaks to the historical erasure and manufactured ignorance that maintains settler colonialism. Here, again, we see connections to the epistemologies of ignorance that I explore in chapters one and two.

derogatory term by asking “What is a D----r Indian, exactly?”[295] The term, a racist and colonialist epithet, was specifically used to target those who are Native to the area of Northern California. “Ostensibly derived from California Indians’ practice of digging for roots,” the term’s popularity, Damon B. Akins and Wailacki and Concow scholar William J. Bauer Jr. argue, “undoubtedly resulted from the fact that it rhymed with another well-known epithet.”[296] The term’s aural evocation of the n-word signals how settler colonialism is subtended by the pervasive nature of anti-Black racism.

This term was used indiscriminately to describe different and distinct Indigenous Nations and communities. As Miranda describes, “The term ‘D----r’ (never an actual tribe, but often used as such by government officials and in the vernacular of the day) referred mostly to Northern California Indians, peoples who had not been missionized by the Franciscans but instead endured the gold rush.”[297] The term’s vernacular elision of differences across Northern California Native communities contributes to the erasure of Indigenous histories and the creation of a singular stock image of “the Indian” that King critiques. Tanana Athabascan scholar and writer Dian Million points to the discursive construction of “the Indian” as well, arguing that “the constitution of the categories that reduced a multiplicity to the subject ‘Indian’ is indeed historical,” an impossible image that was achieved by reconstituting the past in order to secure White settler futures.[298] The epithet’s popularity during the gold rush also signals the violence, both discursive and

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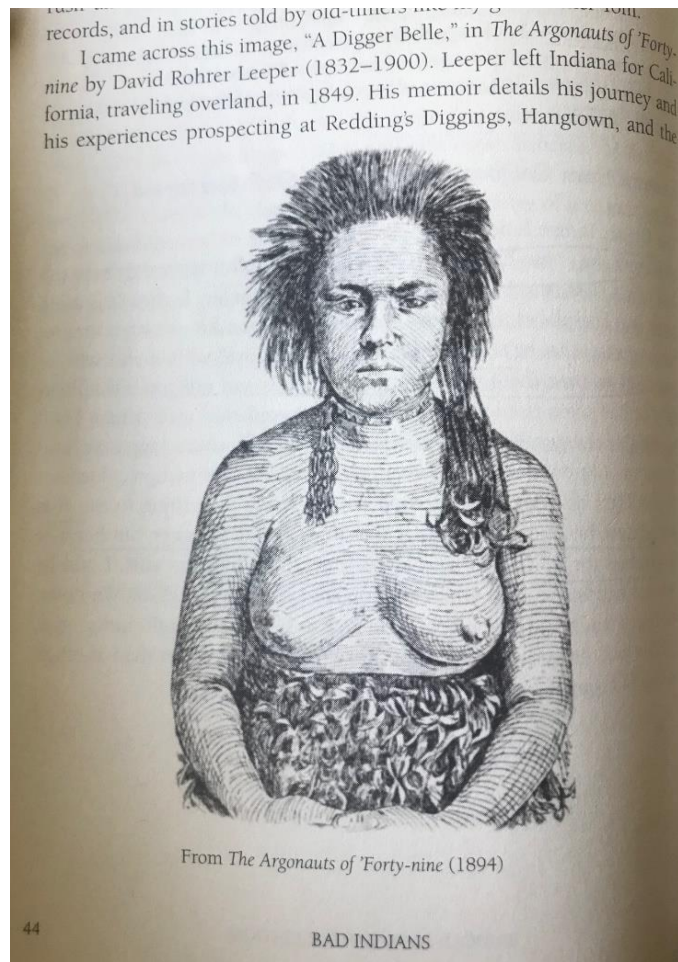
[295] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 44.

[296] Damon B. Akins and William J. Bauer Jr. *We Are the Land: A History of Native California* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2021), 134.

[297] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 45.

[298] Dian Million, “There is a River in Me: Theory from Life,” in *Theorizing Native Studies*, ed. by Audra Simpson and Andrea Smith (Durham: Duke University Press, 2014), 35.

material, that Indigenous peoples survived during this period in which the United States sponsored the genocide and enslavement of those Native to California to support the expansion of colonialism, capitalism, and the nation state. The notion that the West was an expanse of empty land—the mythology of manifest destiny that Miranda critiques in her "Hand of God" image—was not a pre-ordained truth but was manufactured through state-sponsored violence.


records, and in stories told by old-timers

I came across this image, "A Digger Belle," in *The Argonauts of 'Forty-nine* by David Rohrer Leeper (1832–1900). Leeper left Indiana for California, traveling overland, in 1849. His memoir details his journey and his experiences prospecting at Redding's Diggings, Hangtown, and the

From *The Argonauts of 'Forty-nine* (1894)

44 BAD INDIANS

Figure 12. A drawing of a "D----r Belle" from David Rohrer Leeper's *The Argonauts of 'Forty-Nine* that Miranda recontextualizes and rereads. Image and text *from Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, © 2013 by Deborah A. Miranda, published by Heyday.

In the “D----r Belles” vignette, Miranda explicates this violent history by lingering over the details of an ethnographic drawing of an unnamed Indigenous woman from David Rohrer Leeper’s memoir *The Argonauts of ‘Forty-Nine* (see Fig. 12.).[299] In their original context, Leeper’s drawings drip of anthropological voyeurism and objectification. Yet, in her explication of the image, Miranda rejects Leeper’s objectifying gaze of Leeper’s drawing. She reads it against the grain, literally attending to the grain of the drawn marks on the page (their strokes, textures, and shades) to listen to the story of survival they bespeak. The “woman’s portrait,” Miranda states, “drawn from a photograph, tells a story, and tells it with devastating strokes.”[300] Miranda recognizes that “if this woman was in or near the goldfields in ’49, she was in the middle of one of the bloodiest genocides ever documented, one approved and funded by the United States government.”[301] In 1849, at the peak of the gold rush, the US government paid out over one million dollars in bounties to have White settlers, who were pouring into California, kill its Indigenous inhabitants. Rather than manifest destiny, US Westward expansion was a project of state-sanctioned genocide that was funded, at least in part, through the gold rush boon. While Miranda situates the image within this often-unspoken history of the US, she refuses to let that narrative overpower the affective resonance of the image. Miranda notes that, while “at first glance the woman’s hair seems to be a prophetic look forward to the punk do’s of the 1980s [. . .] this wasn’t a traditional California Indian style.” She “realize[s] with horror that this woman had probably cut or burnt her hair close sometime in the recent past, the most likely reason being a traditional act

[299] Leeper was a White settler who came from Indiana to California to find wealth in the gold rush. His memoir details his experiences prospecting throughout northwest California and includes sketches of the Indigenous peoples he encountered there.

[300] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 45.

[301] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 45.

of mourning."[302] Miranda reads the drawing in reverse, against the positivist gaze it presumes, to attend to the affective residues and resonances. The women's short hair juts out from her head in a sacred and symbolic act of mourning, an affective and visual testament to the loss the woman has endured as a result of US colonial and capitalist expansion.

This portrait, drawn from a photograph and (re)contextualized within Miranda's own work, simultaneously reveals and rejects the silencing nature of photography. Miranda recognizes the way that "the nature of photography silences in a peculiar way, crowding out all senses but the visual."[303] Photography attempts to fix its subject, to seize an image as a visual representation of veracity. The presumed truth value of the visual can crowd out other multisensory ways of knowing. Here, Miranda (re)reads and (re)mediates the violence, the silencing nature, of the both the original photograph and the drawing. This practice of recontextualizing violent images is part of the memoir's mosaic methodologies. By blending multiple sources of representation—photography, drawing, state documents, archival fragments, familial histories, and her own poetry and prose—she refuses the authenticating value of any single source. Instead, she cuts and collages to create a more complex, multi-faceted portrayal of Indigenous pasts, presents, and futures. The multi-faceted materiality of the texts invites readers into a "sensuous mode of relation" that "displaces the primacy of the visual—the regime within which queer bodies and bodies of color have been most violently subjected to the demands of cultural legibility," a mode of relation that Kadji Amin, Amber

[302] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 45.

[303] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 45.

Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez argue is essential to understanding how aesthetic form operates against and beneath the surface of the visual to enunciate a social critique.[304]

Historically, the camera shutter, valued for its ability to capture and seize a precise image, acts as "a synecdoche for the operation of the imperial enterprise altogether," as Ariella Aïsha Azoulay argues as she traces the origins of the camera, not to its invention in the early nineteenth century but to 1492, the year of Christopher Columbus's first journey from Spain to what he would call the Americas.[305] While Miranda attends to the colonial origins of photography, she also uncovers openings for alternative affects, gestures, and gazes. She goes on to say that she does "not see the classic 'stoic' Indian" in this woman's face. Instead, she sees "deep grief, and desperation, and the burning of the kind of strength that emerges when all else fails."[306] Miranda's (re)reading of the image underscores the woman's strength alongside her grief and desperation. It attends to the affects and aesthetics of survivance, a term White Earth Anishinaabe scholar Gerald Vizenor understands as "an active sense of presence over absence, deracination, and oblivion" within Indigenous communities.[307] Miranda reads, and teachers her readers how to see, the subtle gestures of survivance in the women's pose: "her hands are clasped in front of her in a pose that seems to me both passive and resistant. Her gaze meets the eye of the camera lens head on, her

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[304] Kadji Amin, Amber Jamilla Musser, and Roy Pérez, "Queer Form: Aesthetics, Race, and the Violences of the Social," *ASAP/Journal* 2, no. 2 (2017): 228.

[305] Ariella Aïsha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (New York: Verso, 2019), 5. Tiffany Lethabo King traces this colonial history beyond 1492, which has become canonized as "the inaugural time-space of the modern mode and era of conquest." She points to 1441, the commencement of the Portuguese slave trade and European colonization in West Africa, to theorize colonial violence in the New World and the intersections of Indigeneity and Blackness in the Western Hemisphere. Tiffany Lethabo King, *The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations of Black and Native Studies* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2019), 1-2.

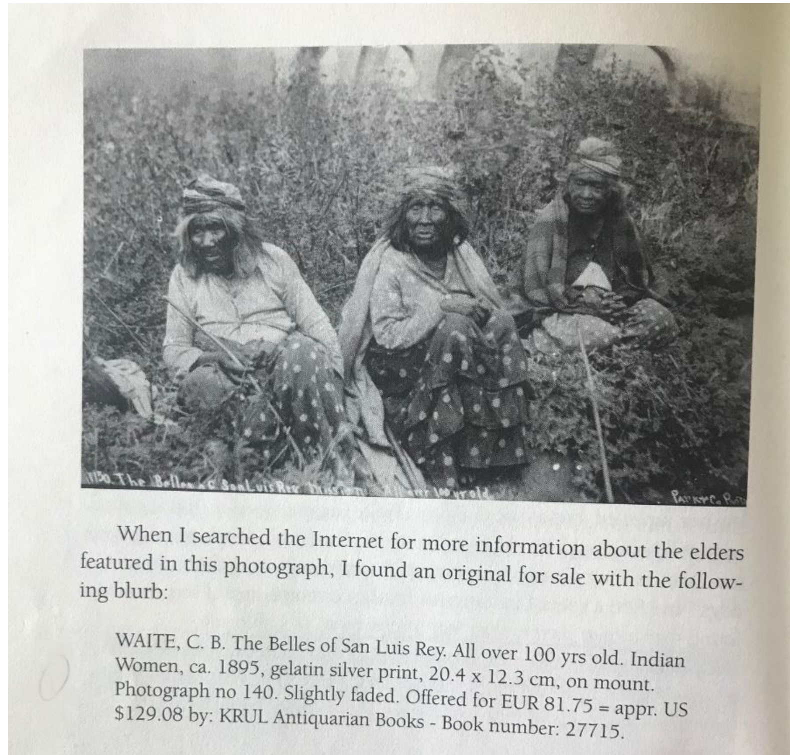
[306] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 45.

[307] Gerald Vizenor, "Aesthetics of Survivance: Literary Theory and Practice," in *Survivance: Narratives of Native Presence*, ed. Gerald Vizenor (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 1.

eyebrows slightly drawn, her lips firmly closed."[308] Through the quiet gestures—the placement of her hands, the lines of her eyebrows and mouth, the direction of her gaze—the woman poses herself as a subject, not an object, of the photograph. In the moment of photographic capture, she simultaneously performs and resists the image of "the classic 'stoic' Indian" that attempts to fix her in time. Even as her "gaze meets the eye of the camera lens head on," she refuses the viewer uninhibited access to her emotions or experiences. The subtleties of her gaze, her posture, her expression suggest a story of survivance that require an act of careful viewing that attends to the different aspects of the image without letting it settle into a static or stoic image. By fragmenting the image into its component parts in order to recuperate the woman's story and subjectivity, Miranda teaches readers how to look for or listen to the affective registers of images that might get overpowered by the colonial power relations and visual discourses that surround them. She models a methodology of viewing that allows gestures of grief, mourning, and survivance to peek through what Rebecca Wanzo recognizes as "visual imperialism": "the production and circulation of racist images that are tools in justifying colonialism and other state-based discrimination."[309]

[308] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 45.

[309] Rebecca Wanzo, *The Content of Our Caricature: African American Comic Art and Political Belonging* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 4.



When I searched the Internet for more information about the elders featured in this photograph, I found an original for sale with the following blurb:

WAITE, C. B. The Belles of San Luis Rey. All over 100 yrs old. Indian Women, ca. 1895, gelatin silver print, 20.4 x 12.3 cm, on mount. Photograph no 140. Slightly faded. Offered for EUR 81.75 = appr. US $129.08 by: KRUL Antiquarian Books - Book number: 27715.

Figure 13. A photograph of "The Belles of San Luis Rey." Image and text *from Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, © 2013 by Deborah A. Miranda, published by Heyday.

Miranda reads this drawing of a photograph alongside another photograph titled "The Belles of San Luis Rey," to unravel the gendered and racialized dynamics of this visual imperialism (see Fig. 13). Miranda initially finds the photograph in an Oceanside, California, chamber of commerce brochure titled *Oceanside: Where Life is Worth Living* and then traces its circulation back through newspaper articles and popular postcards, later finding an original postcard of the three women for sale online for $129.08.[310] The photograph pictures three Luiseño women, "Rosaria, Tomàsa, Vaselia,"[311] whose image was circulated on popular postcards in the early twentieth century, likely without their consent and without

[310] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 48.

[311] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 49.

their compensation. Miranda notes how the title of the image, which refers to the women as "belles," rings of all the "connotations of civilization and domesticated females with the sole purpose of serving as objects for male enjoyment" and "seems to have been a widespread joke in California—sarcasm, irony, mean spirited derision of Indian women," Miranda notes.[312] The derisive use of "belles" to describes the three women positions them both within and at odds with White standards of femininity, civility, and respectability. "Belle" was a title and status that was used to describe White women of the US South's plantation class, whose power and wealth were built on the stolen lands of Indigenous peoples and the stolen labor of the enslaved Africans in a system of colonial and racial capitalism.[313] The women's racialized Indigeneity, constructed through the camera and circulated through the postcard, is used to define and surveil the boundaries of White femininity, which has historically been wielded to justify acts of domestic terrorism and racial violence, most notably the lynching of Black men in the US. The double entendre of "Belle/Bell" further explicates the colonial and racialized violence of the Mission system. "If a 'Mission Bell' is an icon of touristic pleasure," Miranda states, "then to be a 'Mission Belle' is to also be marked as a commodity, female (though not human): marketable, a product for brief enjoyment."[314] The Mission bell was used to sonically surveil Indigenous people by marking the start and stop of the workday and compelling participation in prayer and mass. The

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[312] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 47.

[313] Nichols complicates the language of dispossession or land theft, arguing that, while they have been useful rhetorical frameworks for Indigenous activists, they are "products or effects of the very processes these activists seek to define, explain, and critique. Most obviously, what we mean by dispossession is necessarily related to colonial conceptions of possession, property, theft, expropriation, and occupation, each of which is, at least in part, indebted to the history of colonization." Nichols, *Property Is Theft!*, 11.

[314] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 49.

Mission Bell is a homophone of the Mission Belle, which is also used to surveil and control Indigenous women and their movements through space.

The continuous circulation of these three women's images throughout the twentieth and twenty-first centuries reveals how easily photography and visual culture can "recast human beings as objects, and mythologized objects at that!" as Miranda remarks.[315] Miranda situates the commodification of these women within the history of the Mission system, a system of racial capitalism and colonial genocide that used Indigenous labor and bodies to create a profit. Yet again, Miranda refuses to let these glossy postcards or mythologized images of "Mission Belles" circumscribe Rosaria, Tomàsa, and Vaselia's narrative. She asks readers to look for what lies beneath the surface of the image, the women's collective survivance. Their weathered, wrinkled faces reveal their age, which one newspaper article visually reproduced in the memoir alongside the photograph claims collectively exceeds 300 years.[316] Miranda reads "in the faces of Rosaria, Tomasa, Rosaria, and Vaselia" a story of "tenacious survival. If not of the land, or tribe, or language, or soul, then at least—oh God at least—survival of the body."[317] These women's faces, particularly their gaze, do more than speak to the survival of the body: they *gesture* toward a Native feminist future. Rosaria, Tomàsa, and Vaselia do not look at the camera or return the viewer's gaze. Instead, they look toward something in the distance; all three of them look toward a shared point that lies beyond the bottom left corner of the photographic frame. Even as what Azoulay calls the "imperial shutter" attempts to divide and separate these women, from land, community,

[315] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 48.

[316] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 49.

[317] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 50.

language, and even soul, they see something beyond that colonial horizon, something just out of view of the photographic frame, unattainable to those who remain behind camera shutter.[318]

As Miranda (re)reads images of California's colonial history, she imagines a Native feminist future, one in which the visual imperialism of the camera and its gendered, racialized, and colonial ways of seeing might be unlearned. Returning to the drawn portrait of the unnamed women, Miranda concludes "when I see this woman's image . . . I am stunned by what she has survived. . . Her fierceness—her face a mask of hardness and suspicion—burns through the photographer's lens and artist's hands."[319] These images, drawn and photographed, burn through the page. Their scorched edges and hidden gestures reimagine the potential histories and possibilities that exist at the meeting place of literary and visual cultures. In this multimedia space, Miranda directly addresses the way that visual culture has circulated to circumscribe and objectify Indigenous peoples and, in particular, Indigenous women. By modeling her own practice of reading and listening to the images of these women, she uncovers the personal histories, lived realities, and gestures of survivance that reveal another story that, while attentive to the violent histories of visual imperialism, refuses to be fixed by its lens.

Mapping Mosaic Genealogies and Forms

Throughout *Bad Indians*, Miranda has a method of taking the violent images, archival fragments, and narratives of settler colonialism and turning them into something different,

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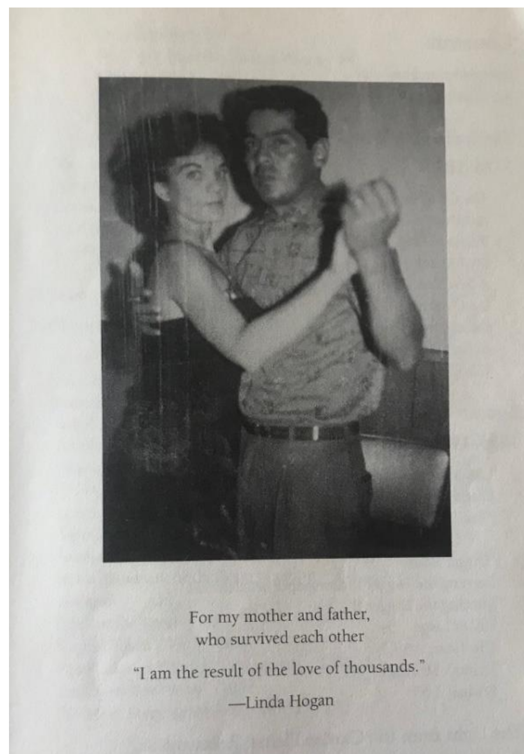
[318] Azoulay describes the technological and imperial work of the camera shutter, saying: "In a split second, the camera's shutter draws three dividing lines: in time (between a before and an after), in space (between who/what is in front of the camera and who/what is behind it), and in the body politic (between those who possess and operate such devices and appropriate and accumulate their product and those whose countenance, resources, and labor are extracted)." Azoulay, *Potential History*, 5.

[319] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 47.

something new. This methodology is not a romanticized recuperation of the past but, rather, a recognition of how the past is ever present and a call to create stories that allow us to envision futures beyond the narrow horizon of the US nation state and its foundational commitments to White supremacy and settler colonialism. Rather than advocating to go back to an impossible moment before "Contact," she is invested in the lived ways that Indigenous peoples can and do survive and provide models for living otherwise. This is the aesthetic, cultural, and political work of Miranda's mosaic form. In this section, I look to two intimate moments where word and image collide on the page to explore the contemporary realities of California's Indigenous peoples through Miranda's own personal and familial history. Miranda's own multi-racial genealogy, I argue, is fundamental the mosaic form as an aesthetic model of how to respond to and collectively heal from and settler colonialism's ongoing violence.


For my mother and father,
who survived each other

"I am the result of the love of thousands."
—Linda Hogan

Fig. 14. The dedication of *Bad Indians.* Image and text *from Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, © 2013 by Deborah A. Miranda, published by Heyday.

Just as the remixed images of the blood quantum charts inside the book's cover introduce the reader to the visual aesthetics and politics of the book before they even dive into its pages, the book's dedication signals the way the texts investments in exploring the visual/verbal and personal/collective through multimedia. A black and white weathered photograph of Miranda's mother, Madgel Ealenor Yeoman, and father, Alfred Edward Miranda, takes up the majority of the page (see Fig. 14). As the two embrace one other in a dance, they stare directly at the camera. While the photograph offers the reader a glimpse into this intimate moment, the couple's defiant look passive participation on either side. Miranda dedicates *Bad Indians* to her "mother and father, who survived each other."[320] This opening invocation alludes to how settler colonialism not only operates at the institutional level but also shapes intimate relationships as well. At the same time, Miranda emphasizes her parents' survival over this violence, just as the text underscores Indigenous peoples' long history of resistance to colonial power relations. When read in tandem with the photograph, the dedication speaks to these scales of survivance and grounds them in the intimate movements her family's own genealogy. It also emphasizes love as essential to Indigenous survivance. Underneath the dedication is a short quotation from Chickasaw author Linda Hogan: "*I* am the result of the love of thousands."[321] Miranda's citation comes from Hogan's *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World* (1995), a text that interweaves short vignettes of the "lessons learned from the land" from a Native feminist perspective.[322] Miranda's evocation of the final line of Hogan's text is slightly altered from the original,

[320] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, dedication.

[321] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, dedication.

[322] Linda Hogan, *Dwellings: A Spiritual History of the Living World* (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1995), 12.

which reads "*You* are the result of the love of thousands."[323] Hogan's declaration underscores a vast intergenerational love, a love that stands in opposition to the intergenerational trauma of colonization.

Miranda's slightly altered allusion to Hogan also affirms *Bad Indians* as memoir, a work of creative nonfiction that prioritizes Miranda's first-person perspective and narrative while situating it within a longer history and narrative of California's Indigenous peoples. While Miranda's text is firmly grounded in a particular place, people, and the narratives that have shaped them, the literary reference to Hogan extends Miranda's work beyond state lines and national and tribal boundaries. Ironically through Hogan's words, the dedication proclaims the way that "Native stories speak to a storied land and storied peoples, connecting generations to a particular locales and in a web of relationships," as Goeman argues.[324] Recognizing the destructive and creative power of stories, Miranda situates her own within the storied landscape of California, yet, just as her own story as a Chumash and Esselen "'mixed-blood' Mission Indian" reveals the interconnections between and across different Indigenous peoples and Nations, the book explores the relational networks that stories create both within and beyond their intended time and place. The dedication—a seemingly paratextual moment that, like the blood quantum charts, which might be easily overlooked—performs *Bad Indians*' larger aesthetics and ethics and places it overtly within a tradition of Native feminist storytelling that, according to Goeman, reconceptualizes "static assumptions of 'Indian,' borders, and gender."[325]

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[323] Hogan, *Dwellings*, 159.

[324] Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 37.

[325] Goeman, *Mark My Words*, 37.

Miranda theorizes the formal structure of her work through her own familial genealogy and embodied knowledge, connecting her personal narrative to Indigenous histories of California and to colonial power relations. In her introduction to the text, titled "California is a Story," Miranda traces her parents' genealogy and reflects on their relationship as the place from which her story begins. Her mother is White, of mixed English, French, and "possible Jewish" ancestry.[326] Her father is Chumash and Esselen, "born on the Tuolomne Rancheria (a California Indian reservation) and raised on the mean streets of Santa Monica."[327] Miranda points to her own multiethnic and multiracial genealogy as part of California's story and locates those histories, particularly those of her Chumash and Esselen father, in specific local geographies.

Miranda goes on to explore the ways in which her parents' different genealogies intersect and conflict in her own embodied history and story: "Out of this particular union, then, comes my story: in the form of a small, light brown baby with dark eyes and wispy brown hair. And dimples. [. . .] And into this body of mine came the full force of two separate streams of human history and story."[328] Here, the form of the story takes the form of Miranda's own body. Miranda transubstantiates form to flesh, just as she does in her poem "When My Body is the Archive" in which she declares, "When my body is the archive, the archives become flesh and blood with a salty genealogy, a hunger for truth, a weariness of the bones."[329] Throughout Miranda's *Bad Indians* and her larger corpus, she resists the

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[326] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xi.

[327] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xi.

[328] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xiv.

[329] Deborah Miranda, "When My Body is the Archive," posted on *Bad NDNS* blog, May 5, 2017, accessed on January 23, 2022, https://badndns.blogspot.com/2017/05/when-my-body-is-archive.html (link has since been removed).

"Enlightenment" logics of the archive—both as a symbolic extension of the colonial nation state and a site of epistemic violence where "knowledge" is produced about Indigenous peoples without their consent or participation.[330] These Enlightenment logics of rationality, whose emergence coincided with and in fact co-created colonial enterprise and expansion, are founded on a Cartesian perspectivalism (which was perpetuated through cartography), a hierarchical way of knowing that shapes how one sees and thus spatially organizes the world. As Martin Jay suggests, "Cartesian perspectivalism was thus in league with a scientific world view that no longer hermeneutically read the world as a divine text, but rather saw it as situated in a mathematically regular spatio-temporal order filled with natural objects that could only be observed from without by the dispassionate eye of the neutral researcher."[331] The dispassionate eye of the presumed neutral researcher feigns an impossible objectivity, one which has been used to survey and objectify Indigenous peoples, lands, and knowledge. Miranda's work rejects this colonial worldview and prioritizes her own embodied positionality as the place from which history and story flow "salty with genealogy."

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[330] Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak first theorized "epistemic violence" as "the remotely orchestrated, far-flung, and heterogeneous project to constitute the colonial subject as Other" and thus obliterate their subjectivity. She critiques leftist intellectuals as being complicit in this process by reifying a concrete subject of oppression while hiding the researcher's own positionality. This double move aligns much of leftist thought with imperialist projects that attempt to speak on behalf of the class that Spivak refers to as "subaltern women," silencing them in the process. Spivak's work, which thinks US and European imperialism together even as it attends to national and local contexts, offers a useful model for putting postcolonial thought into conversation with Native and Indigenous Studies to better understand the global movements of imperialism, colonialism, and neocolonialism alongside transnational coalitional efforts of resistance. Million offers "Indigenism" as another coalitional paradigm that emerges from the "intensely felt theory/strategy of peoples who must deal with permanent settler states in their own homelands (North and South America, Australia, New Zealand, and so on)." Like Spivak's "strategic essentialism," Indigenism, Million emphasizes, "must be understood as a lateral and internal strategy to rebuild Indigenous social relations across hemispheres that are not merely reactive to any nation-state's embrace." See Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, "Can the Subaltern Speak?" In *Can the Subaltern Speak?: Reflections on the History of an Idea*, ed. by Rosalind C. Morris, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010), 35; and Million, "There is a River in Me," 37-38.

[331] Martin Jay, "Scopic Regimes of Modernity," in *Vision and Visuality: Discussions in Contemporary Culture* No. 2, ed. Hal Foster (Seattle: Dia Art Foundation, 1988), 9.

On the page just opposite this declaration, Miranda wades into these salty streams by way of another watery image. Two separate poems, one exploring her mother's and the other her father's genealogies, are slightly offset and positioned against a watermark backdrop of a weathered family photograph (see Fig. 15). A young Miranda is supported by both of her parents who hold her hands as they walk ankle-deep in the Pacific Ocean, a sandy beach full of people in the background. While her parents' faces are somewhat shadowed as they gaze down at her, young Miranda clearly smiles, her gaze held steadily in front of her. Determined to make her way through the water, she leans slightly, relying on her parents' hold to steady her. The structure of the photograph shapes Miranda's poetic form as she writes two poems, on for her mother and one for her father, that stream down their bodies and embrace her with their words.

My father's genealogy
of genocide, smallpox,
enslavement, loss of lan-
guage, religion, culture,
health, land; his inheri-
tance of violence and
struggle and fear, alcohol-
ism, diabetes, poverty.
The Indian languages his
mother and grandmother
spoke together; the
Christmas parties in his
grandfather's house out at
Big Sur; relatives lynched
from the infamous oak
in Monterey. His "street"
Spanish, his Indian accent,
his taste for acorn mush,
salmon straight out of
the Santa Ynez River, his
memories of the old people
who helped raise him.

From my mother, the
French Huguenots flee-
ing to the New World to
escape religious persecu-
tion. English peasants
looking for land. Starving
Irish trying to outrun
famine. Traumatized
Sephardic Jews looking
for yet another new start.
The Baptist minister,
John Gano, who baptized
George Washington as an
adult. The Confederate
general, Richard Mont-
gomery Gano, who, dur-
ing the War Between the
States, commanded Brig.
Gen. Stand Watie's First
Indian Brigade (consisting
of Cherokee, Creek, and
Seminole) at the second
Battle of Cabin Creek.

INTRODUCTION xv

Fig. 15. A poem that traces Miranda's genealogy through visual and verbal poetics. Image and text *from Bad Indians: A Tribal Memoir*, © 2013 by Deborah A. Miranda, published by Heyday.

Overlaying her mother's body on the left edge of the photograph is a poem that explores her European ancestry:

> From my mother
> the French Huguenots
> fleeing to the New World to
> escape religious persecu-
> tion. English peasants
> looking for land. Starving
> Irish trying to outrun
> famine. Traumatized
> Shephardic Jews looking
> for yet another start.[332]

While Miranda points to some of the social, political, and economic conditions that underscore European immigration, such as famine or religious persecution, it is important to recognize how White European immigrants still participate in and benefit from settler colonialism as they flee to the "New World," "looking for land." Miranda later underscores this when, describing her mother's "light-skinned and blue-eyed" parents, she says, "in those days it was common for such people *to settle* in the very land from which the little girl's father and his people had emerged."[333] Mikdashi critiques to the way that non-Indigenous and non-Black Americans often refer to their "ancestors as 'immigrants' without a second thought or any ill intentions," and reminds that to be a settler on Indigenous land requires more that "birth or passport," it requires an implicit consent.[334] Mikdashi challenges the ideology that the US is a "melting pot" of immigrants—an image that, as I discuss in the

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[332] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xv.

[333] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 124; emphasis original.

[334] Mikdashi, "What Is Settler Colonialism?," 31. There is ongoing debate about who is included within the category of "settler," I agree with those scholars who emphasize that descendants of enslaved Africans who were brought to the Americas against their will are not and cannot be settlers. See Bob Joseph, Ashley Marshall, and Chelsea Vowel, "Who Is a Settler, According to Indigenous and Black Scholars," interview by Ashleigh-Rae Thomas, *Vice*, February 15, 2022, https://www.vice.com/en/article/gyajj4/who-is-a-settler-according-to-indigenous-and-black-scholars.

Introduction, has that has never included non-White immigrants—elides "the twinned nature of nation building and genocide."[335] It also invites us to consider the ways that immigrants can and do participate in US's ongoing project of settler colonialism. At the same time, it is important to recognize how US influence and imperialism abroad contour and circumscribe the choices people make when they decide to leave their home nations and the degrees of consent possible. Depending on one's racial identity and nation of origin, one might be celebrated or criminalized as an immigrant in the US. By exploring her family's own mixed-race history and the way that it converges with settler colonialism, Miranda asks readers to consider how the immigration narratives that shape so much US national identity and the cultural imagination of citizenship intersect with and participate in settler colonial violence.

The poem that overlays her father's image on the left edge of the photograph, recounts his "genealogy / of genocide, smallpox, enslavement, loss of lan- / guage, religion, culture, / health, land."[336] Miranda looks back to the legacy of Spanish colonization and connects it to her father's "inheri- / tance of violence and struggle and fear, alcohol- / ism, diabetes, and poverty."[337] The poem notes the distinct violence of different colonial regimes and also shows how they are fundamentally interconnected, syntactically linking them with a semicolon. By connecting the material effects of Spanish colonization, such as "genocide, smallpox, enslavement," to those of ongoing US settler colonialism, "alcoholism, diabetes, poverty," Miranda writes a long history of California that rejects the sanitized, celebratory mythology of the mission system and challenges narratives of US exceptionalism, revealing

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[335] Mikdashi, "What Is Settler Colonialism?," 31

[336] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xv.

[337] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xv.

its violence against Indigenous people as part and parcel of a longer history of Anglo-European colonial relations.

Miranda's poem for her father also rejects pathologizing narratives and images of Indigenous life; her father's inheritance is after all one of both "violence and *struggle*." The poem underscores Indigenous practices of survival and resistance from within colonial power relations:

> The Indian languages his
> mother and grandmother
> spoke together; the
> Christmas parties in his
> grandfather's house out at
> Big Sur; relatives lynched
> from the infamous oak
> in Monterey.[338]

Here the "Indian languages" (Esselen and Chumash) of Al's mother and grandmother resound amongst his grandfather's Christmas parties. Later in the memoir Miranda includes excerpts from her "Language Homecoming Journal," which recounts her efforts to learn one branch of her grandmother's and great-grandmother's Native languages, Esselen. Rather than presenting these Indigenous languages as lost or dying out, Miranda emphasizes the recovery work of language learners, like herself and her sister Louise, who "become Fishers of Words," catching words and releasing "them back out into the wider world as quickly and lovingly as possible" to "let them go forth and multiply."[339] Here, Miranda uses a Christian metaphor to describe the process of language recovery, an ironic reappropriation of the Christian narratives that were used to perpetuate colonial violence, which she explores in a

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[338] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, xv.

[339] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 146.

poem titled “Fisher of Men” earlier in the memoir.[340] Drawing on and deconstructing the religious rhetoric that was used to deprive Indigenous peoples of their language, Miranda highlights the multiplicitous futures of language recovery. Indeed, the Esselen word for recover, *xu-lin*, has multiple meanings, to “reclaim, return, recover,” and Miranda utters the word as both “a plea and a promise” to the Elders that populate this poem and the memoir.

These moments of familial exchange and cultural recovery also exist alongside intense violence, as Miranda recalls “relatives lynched from the infamous oak in Monterey.” The lynching of Indigenous people, as well as Latinx and Chinese people, in the US West has largely been excluded from historiographies of lynching, which tend to focus on anti-Black violence in the US South. This history does not minimize the significance of lynching as a form of anti-Black racism and violence but “acknowledge[s] that the history of lynching has touched other racial and racialized communities in other historical moments,” as Ken Gonzales-Day traces, particularly in the making of the US West. [341] Grappling with these multiracial histories points to how lynching, as a form of racialized collective violence, polices and surveils the boundaries of citizenship and cuts across racialized communities even as it is always subtended anti-Black violence. The specific history of lynching in the US West points to how these boundaries are constructed by the twin logics of White supremacy and settler colonialism. Michael J. Pfeifer argues that these histories of anti-Indigenous violence have “confused and confounded categories of geography, race, and even the very definitions of particular varieties of collective violence.”[342] Miranda, as a multiracial

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[340] See Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 5.

[341] See Ken Gonzales-Day, *Lynching in the West: 1850-1935* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2006), 12.

[342] Michael J. Pfeifer, “Daniel F. Littlefield Jr.’s *Seminole Burning* and the Historiography of the Lynching of Native Americans,” *The Journal of the Gilded Age and Progressive Era* 20 (2021): 82.

Indigenous person, intimately understands how different histories of racialized violence manifest in distinct yet intersecting ways under ongoing White supremacy and settler colonialism. For instance, the fact that her genealogy brings together White, Indigenous (Chumash and Esselen), and Mexican ancestries, as this poem attests, speaks to the different iterations of settler colonialism (Spanish, Mexican, and US) in California and wider processes of racialization and national exclusion in the US.

In Miranda's poem for her father, semicolons link converging and conflicting aspects of his (and her) genealogy, creating a list that does not rank them but places them side by side in a string of signification. Like the use of ellipses and parentheses to portray fugitive epistemologies and temporalities in Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, which I explore in Chapter One, Miranda's semicolon performs the juxtapositional poetics of the mosaic form. Miranda attaches these intergenerational memories to geographic spaces, the parties in Big Sur or the infamous oak in Monterey, and places them against the backdrop of another geography—her own California childhood cast in the photograph of her and her parents on the beach. As word and image collage and collide, that past intertwines with the present and the future, creating a multigenerational braided loop that resists the settler colonialism's linear temporalities and geographies of "progress."[343]

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[343] My discussion of time and space here is informed by Vine Deloria Jr.'s foundational argument that Indigenous epistemologies and cosmologies are place-based whereas Western European identity is time-based, founded on the assumption of linear progress. According to Deloria, "When one group is concerned with the philosophical problem of space and the other with the philosophical problem of time, then the statements of either group do not make much sense when transferred from one context to the other without proper consideration of what is taking place." See Vine Deloria Jr., *God Is Red: A Native View of Religion* (Golden, CO: Fulcrum, 2003), 61-62. That Miranda disrupts colonial temporalities of linear progress, which then get placed on top of Indigenous places and lands through narratives of manifest destiny, is a significant effect of her mosaic aesthetics. My description of Miranda's work as creating a multigeneration braided loop is also evocative of Paula Gunn Allen's conceptualization of "American Indian" as a hoop, or a "vital whole whose different expressions refer to a tradition that is unified and coherent on its own terms." See Paula Gunn Allen, *The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1986), 4.

The dedication and the introductory poem illustrate the way that Miranda uses the mosaic form not only to piece together her own multiracial identity but also to theorize new formations of Indigenous identity, futurity, and community. In a section titled "Mestiza Nation: A Future History of My Tribe," Miranda situates her memoir as part of a tradition of women of color feminist writing, as part of a "Mestiza Nation" that she conceptualizes through Chicana feminist Gloria Anzaldúa and Laguna-Pueblo artist and scholar Paula Gunn Allen. "Chicana, Indian, these women," Miranda states, "knew that the formation of a Mestiza Nation was as much about healing from our childhoods as healing from larger histories."[344] By interweaving her personal narrative within the larger histories of her family and California's Indigenous peoples, Miranda creates a new story that does not merely resist colonial mythologies but actively constructs alternative horizons of being and belonging. Creatively theorizing this future history, she cites Anzaldúa's conceptualization of a "mestiza consciousness."[345] Anzaldúa understood herself as a queer Chicana woman whose identity was grounded in an Indigenous ancestry and history of resistance.[346] According to Anzaldúa,

[344] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 123.

[345] The way that Anzaldúa's "new mestiza" draws on *mestizaje*, a category that has been used to create hegemonic national identities across Latin America and the US in ways that erase and/or romanticize Indigeneity and perpetuate global anti-Blackness, has recently been examined more closely. While Anzaldúa consistently asserted her "new mestiza" and later her "new tribalism" as a coalitional category of multiracial solidarity and struggle against colonial violence, some scholars have pointed out that these terms have been misunderstood and appropriated in ways that have led to the erasure of Indigenous peoples across the Americas and their unique cultural/national histories and struggles. Anzaldúa, herself, recognized this trend and spoke out against it. That Miranda draws on Anzaldúa's work and puts it in conversation with Laguna-Pueblo author Paula Gunn Allen suggests that it can be generative for theorizing Chicanx and Native Feminisms together although not without care. See Linda Martín Alcoff, "The Unassimilated Theorist," *PMLA* 121, no. 1 (2006): 255-259; Gloria E. Anzaldúa, Simon J. Ortiz, Inéz Hernández-Avila, and Domino Perez, "Speaking across the Divide," *Studies in American Indian Literatures* 15, no. 3/4 (2003): 7–22; Cherríe Moraga, "The salt that cures: remembering Gloria Anzaldúa," in *A Xicana Codex of Changing Consciousness*: W*ritings, 2000–2010* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2007), 116–130; and Domino Renee Pérez, "New Tribalism and Chicana/o Indigeneity in the Work of Gloria Anzaldúa," in *Routledge Handbook of Chicana/o Studies*, ed. Francisco A. Lomelí, Denise A. Segura, and Elyette Benjamin-Labarthe (New York: Routledge, 2019), 240–252.

[346] See Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 21; and Gloria E. Anzaldúa et. al, "Speaking across the Divide," 8.

the new mestiza is "an Indian in Mexican culture" and a "Mexican from an Anglo point of view."[347] Through her navigations of the borderlands (both the geographic space of the US Southwest, a space that Miranda also navigates, and the epistemological space of being in-between), she develops a consciousness that has the capacity to break down hegemonic (White supremacist and colonial) ways of thinking to envision new realities. While this consciousness is forged in the violence of the borderlands, a space of racialized and colonial violence that Anzaldúa describes as "*una herida abierta*," an open wound where two worlds grate against one another, "its energy comes from continual creative motion."[348] The mosaic both emerges from and aesthetically reorganizes the geographic, political, and epistemological space of the borderlands. It is Miranda's method, theory, and praxis of a mestiza consciousness that helps her understand her own multiracial identity and the future histories the Indigenous communities to which she belongs.

The history of California is one in which multiple colonial nation states grate against one another, inflicting violence on Indigenous peoples and lands. *Bad Indians* emerges from this wounded landscape and asks, what do we do with the remains of settler colonialism? The question is both representational and political. Mikdashi argues that settler colonialism defies representation, noting that "one can only address the remainder of a settler-colonial project, particularly one as successful as the United States." Settler colonialism's destructive power, its logic of elimination, thwarts representation. Miranda recalls this difficulty when she confesses, "I've come to the conclusion, horrifying and bitter as the words sound that there are too few original pieces of our tribe left to glue back together. The gaps in such a

[347] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 79.

[348] Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera*, 3 & 80.

construction are violent and sickening."[349] Miranda recognizes the impossibility of going back to an original moment before "Contact." Instead, she turns her memoir into a contact zone that reckons with the ways in in which the asymmetrical violence of colonialism has fundamentally disrupted Indigenous communities and ways of life while also attending to forms of Indigenous resistance and survivance.[350] By collecting the fragmented remains of settler colonialism—the images and documents through which it gains material and discursive power—and interweaving them with her own personal narrative, Miranda creates a multimedia and multiperspectival contact zone where conflicting and intersecting histories, temporalities, geographies, and narratives come together in a collective but not cohesive picture.[351]

While "it is impossible to write about that which cannot be known," Mikdashi maintains that "there is an ethical imperative to do so."[352] Miranda responds to this representational quandary and ethical imperative by blending word and image through her mosaic form. For Miranda, this form of storytelling is also a form of healing:

> My tribe must reinvent ourselves [. . .] we must think of ourselves as a mosaic, human beings constructed of multiple sources of beauty, pieces that alone are merely incomplete but which, when set into a new design together complement the shards around us, bring wholeness to the world and ourselves.[353]

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[349] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 136.

[350] Mary Louise Pratt conceptualizes and defines "contact zones," as "social spaces where cultures meet, clash, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today." Mary Louise Pratt, "Arts of the Contact Zone," *Profession* 1991 (1991): 34.

[351] Million, "There Is a River in Me," 36.

[352] Mikdashi, "What Is Settler Colonialism?," 24.

[353] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 136.

Miranda's mosaic aesthetic is also a theory of Indigenous identity, community, and futurity. Recognizing the impossibility of returning to a moment before colonialism and refusing federal frameworks of recognition and inclusion, *Bad Indians*, instead, looks to the persistent presence and survivance of Indigenous peoples past and present in order to pry loose settler colonialism's grip on the future. While the extent of settler colonialism and its violence may be impossible to represent, what Miranda does represent is the intergenerational, multiracial, mosaic realities of her own story and those that speak through her. Miranda's memoir is the stuff of Indigenous theory. As Million argues "story *is* Indigenous theory [. . .] narratives serve the same function as any theory, in that they are a practical vision."[354] Miranda's story, both her own personal story and the one she (re)constructs about California and its Indigenous peoples, theorizes the contemporary realities of Indigenous peoples living under siege in the settler colonial, White supremacist nation state of the US. More than this, *Bad Indians*, Miranda's "Post-Colonial Art Project," provides a practical vision of art, both literary and visual, as source of power and a means of survival in the struggle for this post-colonial world.[355]

[354] Million, "There is a River in Me," 35.

[355] Miranda, *Bad Indians*, 136.

Chapter Four

Looking to Latinx Comics: Redrawing National Borders of Belonging

Figure 16. "Signs of the Times" (1994), a cartoon based on the "Immigrant Crossing" signs seen across the US Southwest. Lalo Alcaraz, *Migra Mouse: Political Cartoons on Immigration* (New York: RDV Books/Akashic Books, 2004), 32. ©2022 Lalo Alcaraz. Cartoon appears courtesy of Lalo Alcaraz and Andrews McMeel Syndication.

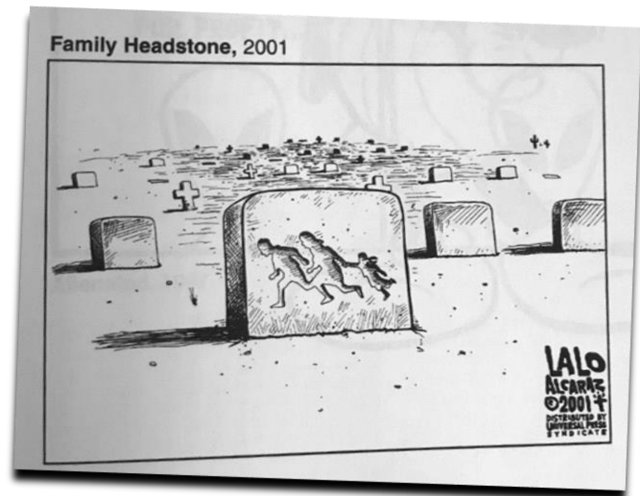

Figure 17. "Family Headstone" (2001), a cartoon that takes these "Signs of the Times" to their deadly conclusions. Lalo Alcaraz, *Migra Mouse: Political Cartoons on Immigration* (New York: RDV Books/Akashic Books, 2004), 79. ©2022 Lalo Alcaraz. Cartoon appears courtesy of Lalo Alcaraz and Andrews McMeel Syndication.

Lalo Alcaraz, a Mexican American cartoonist born to immigrant parents in Southern California and winner of the prestigious Herblock Prize for editorial cartooning,[356] uses the single-panel form of the editorial cartoon to dramatize the violent enclosures of national

[356] "2022 Prize Winner: Lalo Alcaraz," The Herb Block Foundation, May 30, 2022, https://www.herbblockfoundation.org/herblock-prize/prize-winners/2022/lalo-alcaraz.

borders.[357] The image of the of public "Caution" or "Immigrant Crossing" sign is one that has reappeared in his work for the past three decades. Through the familiar freeway signs, he traces the iconography of anti-immigrant sentiment over time and across the geographies of the US-Mexico borderlands. The first cartoon, "Signs of the Times," was published in 1994, the year that California voters passed Proposition 187, also known as the "Save Our State" referendum. This law not only prevented undocumented immigrants from accessing public services, including education and healthcare, but also allowed individuals to target, profile, and report anyone they suspected of being undocumented. That the rhetoric around proposition 187 emerged during a period of recession in California reveals how migrant workers and immigrants become scapegoats during times of economic crisis.[358] The law was

[357] Similar to how I noted the specific affiliation of Indigenous artists and authors in my previous chapter, I note the nation of origin, whether first-generation or familial, for the Latinx artists and authors I explore. I do this to emphasize that Latinx is not a monolithic category and to recognize the importance of historical, national, geographic, and linguistic specificity when describing heterogeneous Latinx experiences. Cristina Beltrán notes how terms like "Latino/a/x" operate under the homogenizing framework of *Latinidad* to conflate difference and serve diverse, and often conflicting, political impulses. Cristina Beltrán, *The Trouble with Unity: Latino Politics and the Creation of Identity* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2010), 6. On the other hand, Claudia Milian notes how "LatinX," which emerged through the linguistic strategies of queer and trans Latinx youth in digital spaces, provides "an urgent hermeneutic" that can further break open rather than unify knowledge. Claudia Milian, *LatinX* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2019), 6. While I try to be specific, when possible, I also recognize Latinx as a critical heuristic, and use it throughout this work to signal the capacious cultural work and collective aesthetics of Latinx comics in which the artists I examine participate.

[358] Cristina Beltrán notes the important distinctions between "migrant" and "immigrant," which often gets blurred in popular discourses: "The term *immigrant* generally refers to someone who has moved from one country to another with plans to relocate permanently. Technically, *immigrants* in the United States generally refer to legal permanent residents, those who hold visas, or those who have become U.S. citizens. By contrast, *migrant* is a broader term that refers to anyone who is in the process of relocating to another country as well [*sic.*] someone who has already moved. The term is inclusive of refugees and asylum seekers as well as people who are still on the move or who have moved to a country but wish to eventually return to their home country. *Migrant* also makes no reference to legal status." Cristina Beltrán, *Cruelty as Citizenship: How Migrant Suffering Sustains White Democracy* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2020), 5; emphasis original. Alfonso Gonzales also maintains that "migrant" more accurately represents the "circular relationship" that characterize how Latinx families move across countries within the Americas. Alfonso Gonzales, *Reform without Justice: Latino Migrant Politics and the Homeland Security State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 184. While I recognize these important linguistic distinctions, I use "immigrant" throughout the majority of this chapter because that is the language most often used by the cartoonists themselves and because I am discussing visual discourses that are wrapped up in language of legal status and citizenship.

struck down in 1998 because it was deemed unconstitutional and in violation of the "Equal Protection Clause" of the Fourteenth Amendment. A similar proposition reemerged in California in 2004 and later in Arizona (S.B. 1070), which I will discuss later in this chapter.[359] Alcaraz's use of a literal sign signals the ways in which the semiotics of visual culture are used to surveil and delineate the boundaries of national belonging (see Fig. 16). The sign satirizes real signs that were posted in high immigrant traffic areas and, while they sought to protect (at least in the most immediate sense) those who might be tempted to cross freeways, they "were seen by many as an inhuman rendering of immigrants," as Alcaraz notes, in their similarity to animal crossing signs.[360] The "Caution" sign, rising in the foreground against the dark cross-hatched wall of the border, features the silhouette of a family, devoid of any distinguishing features. In addition to the background of the border within the cartoon, there are two other borders at play in this image. The black outline of the square sign creates a border within the frame of the single-panel cartoon. This panel within a panel reveals the border as an "unnatural boundary," as Gloria Anzaldúa notes, that simultaneously separates and encloses.[361] Alcaraz uses the comics border as a framing and formal device to critique the violence of the US-Mexico border and the visual iconography that surrounds it. The second cartoon reveals these material consequences by takings these "Signs of the Times" to their deadly conclusion, picturing the same silhouette of a family

[359]See "A Latinx Resource Guide: Civil Rights Cases and Events in the United States," Library of Congress, accessed May 30, 2022, https://guides.loc.gov/latinx-civil-rights/california-proposition-187.

[360] Lalo Alcaraz, *Migra Mouse: Political Cartoons on Immigration* (New York: RDV Books/Akashic Books, 2004), 32.

[361] Gloria Anzaldúa, *Borderlands/La Frontera: The New Mestiza* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1987), 3.

engraved on a headstone (see Fig. 17). The “Family Headstone” (2000) becomes a three-dimensional panel amid an array of other anonymous boxes of grief.

The comics border is a productive space for theorizing the aesthetic, material, and ideological effects of national borders. Cathy Schlund-Vials, for instance, describes the comics border as a “hypervisible invisible schema” that aesthetically evokes “current conceptualizations of transnationalism, and contemporary debates concerning immigration policy.”[362] As focalizing and framing device, the comics border not only visualizes but also theorizes the infrastructural violence and material realities of national borders. Brenna Clarke Gray, writing within a Canadian context, goes on to explore the intellectual interconnections between border studies and comics studies, arguing that “the primacy of a border-space in comics [. . .] offers a useful way to probe the border as a literal and metaphoric structure” that shapes national identity and collective epistemologies.[363] Single-panel comics, often associated with the editorial cartoon, heighten the formal and cultural work of the comics border and thus offer unique methodologies for engaging with the US-Mexico border as a visual symbol of and material barrier to citizenship.

Single-Panel Possibilities

Explanations of how comics operate at the level of form often rely on the sequential juxtaposition of images in ways that inevitably deprioritize single-panel cartoons, despite their prominence in comics’ historical and aesthetic genealogy. Scott McCloud’s definition of comics as “juxtaposed pictorial and other images in deliberate sequence, intended to

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[362] Cathy Schlund-Vials, “Border,” in *Keywords for Comics Studies*, ed. by Ramzi Fawaz, Shelley Streeby, and Deborah Elizabeth Whaley (New York: New York University Press, 2021), 28.

[363] Brenna Clark Gray, “Border Studies in the Gutter: Canadian Comics and Structural Borders,” *Canadian Literature*, no. 228/229 (Spring/Summer 2016): 171.

convey information and/or to produce an aesthetic response in the reader" seemingly leaves out the possibility of editorial cartoons or single-panel comics.[364] According to this definition, single-panel cartoons' position within comics is uncertain at best, as they sit uneasily with the expectation of juxtaposed sequential images. Many comics scholars have critiqued his definition of comics for its formalism and ahistoricism.[365] Bart Beaty, for instance, argues that "McCloud's insistence on strict formalism, and his suggestion that the essence of comics is the series of pictures, has, in its own way, helped to elide other potentially fruitful definitions of comics."[366] Beaty notes how the tendency to essentialize sequence in comics scholarship not only elides attention to the political economies of comics and cartoons but also forecloses other productive avenues of inquiry. Even in more nuanced theories of comics, the emphasis on juxtaposition and on the relationship between panels makes little space for single-panel images. Thierry Groentsteen, whose *Système de la bande dessinée* (1999) later translated as *The System of Comics* (2007) is understood as one of the most expansive semiotic analyses of the form, argues that "the solidarity between the panels [. . .] is the true foundation of the medium, the main and perhaps only unquestionable elements of its definition."[367] Recognizing the importance of the panel, I want to pause and think about the opportunities for juxtaposition, perhaps even seriality, that exist within the

[364] Scott McCloud, *Understanding Comics: The Invisible Art* (New York: William Morrow Paperbacks, 1994), 9.

[365] In their introduction to *A Comics Studies Reader*, Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, include editorial cartoons in their intentionally capacious definition of comics. Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester, "Introduction," in *A Comics Studies Reader*, ed. by Jeet Heer and Kent Worcester (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2008), xiii.

[366] Bart Beaty, *Comics Versus Art* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2012), 35.

[367] Thierry Groensteen, *The System of Comics*, translated by Bart Beaty and Nick Nguyen (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), 90.

border of the single frame. Understanding this juxtapositional potential, I argue, is useful for considering the wide variety of word and image form that this project engages and for theorizing how the collaging of visual and verbal aesthetics might model coalitional critiques of citizenship as a category that cuts across differently racialized communities.

The single-panel comics this chapter looks to strategically triangulate—or geometrize—familiar elements and recognizable iconography of the nation to defamiliarize the reader's non-fictional world and invite them to see the boundaries of citizenship and national borders of belonging anew. Investigating mainstream Latinx comics, Frederick Luis Aldama argues that "it is the skillful and willful visualizing—geometrizing—of character, theme, and plot that guides our gap-filling processes and shapes our experience of a given comic book. It is the visuals that primarily drive our co-creative insertion into a storyworld."[368] Because single-panel comics have such little space to communicate their meaning, they rely on visual economy—condensing and amplifying the skillful and willful process of visualization Aldama describes—and on building narrative through external points of reference. Through these references to the social, economic, and political realities of our world, the cartoon invites the reader into a co-creative relationship, including their emotional and cognitive processes in the meaning-making of the comic by calling on their prior knowledge.[369]

While comics and cartoons engage readers in a co-creative relationship that invites them to reorient their perspective, even if only temporarily, the medium itself is not inherently transformative. Like any medium, comics can be used either to reinforce

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[368] Frederick Luis Aldama, *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics* (Tucson: The University of Arizona Press, 2017), 94.

[369] Aldama, *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics*, 90-91.

hegemonic ideals or to deconstruct them. Aldama makes clear his guarded optimism in comics' political possibilities when he says:

> Comic books don't float free in some ethereal platonic space. Like all cultural phenomena, they are produced and circulate within specific social and historical material conditions. They are not, in my opinion, agents of transformation of their material contexts, however. They can, of course, be manipulated in ways that restrict or unleash the imagination.[370]

The comics form does not presuppose transformative politics. However, artists can strategically employ what Aldama refers to as a "will to style," an aesthetic willfulness and artfulness, to critically comment on their social, material, and political contexts and to "unleash the imagination" of their reader in the process.[371] Editorial cartoons, in particular, draw on the social and historical material conditions of their time to invite viewers to critically reimagine their political presents. In order to think about the unique affordances and political possibilities of single-panel cartoons for redrawing national borders of belonging,[372] I turn to two exemplars in the form, Eric J. García and Alberto Ledesma, who build on a long genealogy of Latinx political and politicized cartooning that includes artists such as Lalo Alcaraz. These two Latino artists, both Mexican American, use the single-panel form to distill prescient political issues. Much of their work challenges narratives of American exceptionalism and the ways that they coalesce around discourses of immigration, citizenship, and national belonging.

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[370] Frederick Luis Aldama, *Your Brain on Latino Comics: From Gus Arriola to Los Bros Hernandez,* (Tucson: University of Texas Press, 2009), 4.

[371] Aldama describes an artist's "will to style" as their "skill and responsibility to the subject matter." Will to style highlights the political contours of an artist's aesthetic practice. Aldama, *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics*, 4.

[372] I use "single-panel comics" and "single-panel cartoons" interchangeably to attempt to disrupt the hierarchical distinction between comics and cartoons within comics studies and because one of the artists I analyze, Alberto Ledesma, does not work strictly within the editorial form.

A brief look at the distribution and publication of García's and Ledesma's work reveals the ideological and aesthetic affinities between the two artists. García first began publishing editorial cartoons in *The Daily Lobo*, The University of New Mexico's independent student newspaper, in the early 2000s and has more recently been publishing work under the banner of *El Machete Illustrated*, which is largely shared through social media platforms like Tumblr and Instagram. In these cartoons, the title *El Machete Illustrated* appears on the blade of a machete that cuts through a ribbon with the subtitle "cutting through the bullshit." This titular provocation sits atop the panel frame of García's cartoons, making clear how he sees his editorial cartoons as an alternative to the "bullshit" of mainstream media and popular political discourses. *Drawing on Anger: Portraits of US Hypocrisy* (2018) collects a swath of García's cartoons and frames them within the political context of the year they were created, beginning with the height of President George W. Bush's so-called "War on Terror" in 2004 and concluding with a critique of then President Donald Trump in 2017. García's editorial cartoons offer a radical anti-capitalist, anti-racist, anti-imperialist critique of contemporary American politics. The cartoons call out the hypocrisy of a nation that weaponizes democracy to justify acts of aggression both domestically and abroad—from state-sanctioned brutality and anti-Black racism, to holding children and families seeking refuge in cages, to funding wars that fuel neoliberal global capitalism and American imperialism.

Similar to the proliferation of García's cartoons through social media platforms, Alberto Ledesma began sharing his "Diary of a Dreamer" cartoons, pieces that literally came out of the pages of his Moleskine journal, on Facebook in 2011. Many of these cartoons are now collected in a graphic memoir entitled *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer: Undocumented*

Vignettes from a Pre-American Life (2017). *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* uses single-panel comics as visual vignettes that zoom in on the intimate, individual ways that undocumented status affects how one understands and moves in their world. Ledesma links these visual vignettes through extended narrative of his own biography as a formerly undocumented student growing up in East Oakland. Ledesma became an American citizen under the amnesty provision of the Federal Immigration and Control Act of 1986 during his sophomore year of college at the University of California, Berkeley, and he now serves as the Arts and Humanities Graduate Diversity Director, a role in which he continues to advocate for undocumented students and their families. While *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* centers how educational institutions might support and/or alienate undocumented students, his online repertoire responds to a range of issues, offering a visual critique that, while not always as insurgent as García's cartoons, responds to and contests many of the same dominant narratives in mainstream news media. The immediate distribution of these artists' work through platforms like Facebook, Tumblr, or Instagram allows them to offer real-time social commentary on national politics in a way that speaks to a wider public but also develops specific readerly communities.

Both García and Ledesma have had their work collected and published under Latinographix, a creative series published by The Ohio State University Press. The series "showcases graphic and comic books—graphic novels, memoir, nonfiction, and more—by Latinx writers and artists [. . .] exploring topics from immigration to family, education to identity."[373] The publication of García's and Ledesma's work through an academic press recognizes that cartoons and comics are forms of knowledge production and cultural

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[373] Latinographix," *The Ohio State University Press,* accessed July 1, 2020, https://ohiostatepress.org/books/series/latinographix.html.

criticism, and the series title Latinographix notes how this knowledge comes from a situated identity, one that is not monolithic but speaks from and to diverse Latinx identities, communities, and geographies. Given the radicalized racist xenophobia that won Trump the presidency and that he emboldened, the publication of Ledesma and García's work has a particular currency in the US's contemporary moment in the aftermath of Trump's presidency, and both collections notably conclude with a critique of Trump.

While these two artists' works vary in terms of their aesthetics and, at times, their ideological critique, their use of the single-panel cartoons, the distribution and collection of their work, and their investments in responding to contemporary issues in real time make a comparative analysis particularly fruitful for theorizing the single-panel methodologies and epistemologies of comics. I first begin with an analysis of how García geometrizes the devices of the single-panel comic to reveal the systemic inequalities of the US-Mexico border. After reckoning with the formal and structural contours of García's comics, I then turn to Ledesma's work to highlight the epistemological stakes of single-panel comics. These artists willfully use the single-panel form—including icon, framing, perspective, and non-fictional references—to challenge dominant narratives of the US-Mexico border and the way that it creates the category of "undocumented." Through their use of the single-panel frame, they reorient the visual iconography of citizenship and model alternative epistemologies of seeing national borders and belonging.

Reframing Perception through Non-fictional Reference

Well versed in the genealogy of editorial cartoons, García geometrizes visual icons, familiar plot devices, non-fictional references, and dialogue and labeling to bring to light the structural inequalities of the US's border politics. His work reuses visual icons to create a

cast of characters that reappear across his cartoons, accruing meaning with each repetition and thus building a sense of seriality or sequentiality across his corpus. The "Fat Cat," for instance, represents the insatiability of global capitalism. Pigs stand in for the police, a longtime vernacular and a visual shorthand for the activist call "All Cops Are Bad/Bastards" (ACAB). Uncle Sam—the symbol of the US nation state—showcases the hypocrisy of patriotic ideals of American democracy against the disparate realities of those who fall outside of the category of "citizen"—not only those who are undocumented but also those who do not fit into the White, cis-male, hetero, upwardly mobile, educated, English-speaking ideal of American citizenship. Uncle Sam is frequently shown in a traditionally heteropatriarchal domestic partnership with Lady Liberty—a figure that presents a more liberal, well-intentioned position but one that is equally complicit in Uncle Sam's investments in racism, capitalism, imperialism, and war, nonetheless. García playfully amplifies the gendered domestic tension between Uncle Sam and Lady Liberty to draw out the contradictions of the US. For instance, in a 2006 cartoon Uncle Sam berates Lady Liberty for adding too much "spice" to the melting pot because it upsets his stomach (see Fig. 18).[374] Through this humorous domestic tension, García pointedly comments on the hypocrisy baked into the mythology of the melting pot. As Eduardo Bonilla-Silva argues, however, "that melting pot never included people of color. Black [people], Chinese [people], Puerto Ricans, etcetera, could not melt into the pot. They could be used as wood to produce the fire for the pot, but they could not be used as material to be melted into the pot."[375] García's gag reveals

[374] Eric J. García, *Drawing on Anger: Portraits of US Hypocrisy* (Columbus: Mad Creek Books, 2018), 28.

[375] Eduardo Bonilla-Silva quoted in "Episode Three: The House We Live In," *Race: The Power of an Illusion*, directed by Llewellyn M. Smith (San Francisco: California Newsreel, 2003), film, 00:11:13-30.

in a single panel that the ideal of the American melting pot demands assimilation into normative White citizenship. This is just one example of how García uses national iconography to first call forth readers' prior knowledge about the so-called democratic principles they represent and then to flip those discourses on their heads, revealing their hypocrisy.

Figure 18. Eric J. García, *Drawing on Anger: Portraits of US Hypocrisy* (Columbus: Mad Creek Books, 2018), 35. Image courtesy of Ohio State University Press.

In reframing non-fictional references, recognizable tropes, and iconic images, García defamiliarizes these familiar situations to comment on the contradictions that plague American democracy. Tracing a genealogy of how Latinx comics artists have reshaped

genres to imagine better worlds, Aldama argues, “In choosing to reframe real and fictional worlds, they also ask the reader to look upon this newly reframed object from a new angle of vision; in so doing, they amplify the reader’s everyday cognitive and emotive activities.[376]” Latinx artists like García willfully draw on their own capacities to imagine other worlds—an aesthetic that emerges from experience and epistemology—to strategically geometrize their visual storyworlds in ways that ask readers to draw on their own knowledge and to see it from a new angle of vision.

Figure 19. Eric J. García, *Drawing on Anger: Portraits of US Hypocrisy* (Columbus: Mad Creek Books, 2018), 94. Image courtesy of Ohio State University Press.

[376] Aldama, *Your Brain on Latino Comics*, 83.

In this 2011 cartoon, García creates a caricature of US-Mexico border politics in Arizona (see Fig. 19). While Arizona is the central character (or rather caricature) of the cartoon, the presence of Uncle Sam and Lady Liberty draw out the national implications of Arizona's anti-immigration and anti-immigrant laws, and the "Drug Dealer" looming behind the door of Mexico alludes to the way that the US-Mexico border makes immigrants further vulnerable to cartel violence and traffickers. In this cartoon, the domestic affairs between Lady Liberty and Uncle Sam take on a new meaning given the content of the cartoon—dramatizing the domestic tensions between state and national governments. Juliet P. Stumpf argues that shifting the locus of immigration law from the federal government to what she calls "domestic spheres" or subnational powers (states) has led to the criminalization of immigration law, where local law enforcement becomes the arbiter of immigration policy rather than the federal government.[377] Arizona is just one example of how state and local governments have attempted to regulate immigration. It is important to note that the land that we now consider Arizona was part of Mexico long before it was purchased by the US in 1853.[378] As Chris Lukinbeal and Laura Sharp maintain, "Recalling the purchase of this territory reminds us that immigration via Arizona is not only a socially changing phenomenon, but a geographic one as well."[379] Within this context, immigrant activists'

[377] Juliet P. Stumpf, "States of Confusion: The Rise of State and Local Power Over Immigration," *North Carolina Law Review*, 86 (2008): 1157.

[378] As cited in Chris Lukinbeal and Laura Sharp's "Performing America's Toughest Sheriff: Media as Practice in Joe Arpaio's Old West," "The Gadsden Purchase of what is now Southern Arizona and New Mexico from Mexico in 1853 was the last major land acquisition to complete the contiguous United States." Chris Lukinbeal and Laura Sharp, "Performing America's Toughest Sheriff: Media as Practice in Joe Arpaio's Old West," *GeoJournal* 80 (2015): 882.

[379] Lukinbeal and Sharp, "Performing America's Toughest Sheriff," 882.

rallying cry, "We didn't cross the border, the border crossed us," articulates a pointed critique of national borders, the nation state, and the geopolitical history of Arizona.[380]

In García's cartoon, these state and national tensions are personified. Lady Liberty, face distraught, begs, "Sam, do something! He's out of control!," as she grasps her hand, which has been prickled by a monstrous-like cactus labeled "AZ," Arizona. [381] The cactus represents Arizona's state and local government and law enforcement and their increasingly militant criminalization of immigration and immigrants. Uncle Sam brushes her off, saying, "I used to be the same way. He's fine," justifying Arizona's behavior with a retort that rings of the misogynistic mea culpa "boys will be boys."[382] Again, García relies on the trope of a stereotypical domestic situation to underscore tensions between state and national governments and show the federal government complicity in the Arizona's criminal immigration politics.

While García does not explicitly label the cactus, aside from "AZ," the pistol and boots invite a reading of Joe Arpaio, the Sheriff of Maricopa County from 1993 to 2017.[383] Arpaio was and continues to be a divisive figure who came into the media spotlight for his brutal implementation of racial profiling under Senate Bill (SB) 1070. SB 1070 was modeled on California's Proposition 187 and, when it was passed in 2010, was the broadest and strictest anti-immigration and anti-immigrant measure of its time. The law allowed police to

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[380] Lukinbeal and Sharp, "Performing America's Toughest Sheriff," 882.

[381] García, *Drawing on Anger*, 94.

[382] García, *Drawing on Anger*, 94.

[383] Arpaio, first elected in 1992, was elected six times as Maricopa County (larger Phoenix area) Sherriff. Arpaio was defeated for what would have been his seventh reelection in November 2016, shortly after he was charged with contempt of court for having ignored a federal judge's order to stop racially profiling people based solely on the suspicion that they were undocumented. Arpaio, a vocal supporter of former President Trump, was pardoned by Trump in 2017.

enforce federal and state immigration laws by checking the immigration status of any person they had "reasonable suspicion" of being undocumented, essentially legalizing racial profiling and harassment.[384] The US Supreme Court found the law unconstitutional and overturned it in 2012.

Throughout his tenure, Arpaio promoted himself as "America's Toughest Sheriff," performing a hypermasculine modern-day "Wild West" identity that, according to Lukinbeal and Sharp, "by defining the self as white, lawful, rational, and masculine [. . .] serves as a mechanism by which to render others as brown, illegal, irrational, and feminine."[385] García's comic reverses that discourse, rendering Arpaio as irrational—mouth agape and fangs showing—firing shots around the room, pouring gas and leaving fire in his wake, and kicking the dog labeled as "undocumented." García's cactus caricature of Arpaio precisely illustrates the way that racist and xenophobic immigration policies are wrapped up in White supremacist and heteropatriarchal ideal. That García relies on caricature, an aesthetic that has disproportionately been used against people of color in the US, speaks to the important reversal at play within the cartoon. The image, without even naming Arpaio, evokes the media frenzy around him, one that often helped him perform his "wild west" aesthetic and shows these media representations and the man himself for what they are. At the same time, the comic seamlessly moves between pointed specificity and structural critique. Because the cactus goes unnamed beyond "AZ," it acts as a metonym for the state writ large and its racist and xenophobic immigration policies.

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[384] Arizona State Senate, "Senate Bill 1070," *Arizona State Legislature*, 2010, Accessed July 3, 2020, https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/bills/sb1070s.pdf.

[385] Lukinbeal and Sharp, "Performing America's Toughest Sheriff," 884.

In addition to the pistols the cactus wields, it holds two other weapons: a spray can of SB 1167, still dripping from tagging the wall with “English Only,” and a gas can labeled HB 2281, which fuels the flames that burn the “Ethnic Studies” bookshelf. While there have been multiple bills introduced as SB 1167, García refers here to a bill that sought to make English the “official language” of the state.[386] The legislation was vetoed by then Governor Janet Napolitano in 2005, not because of its racist xenophobia, but because of the lack of funding to implement it. Representative Russel Pearce reintroduced a similar measure, Proposition 103, just a year later, and it was passed in 2006. Proposition 103 requires all official actions of the government to be conducted in English. The law explicitly targets Spanish-speaking immigrants and citizens. Arguments for the law made claims to cultural assimilation and national unity, but, as Elise M. DuBord points out, these initiatives are not means of inclusion but tools “that Anglos call on when they perceive that their privileged status as monolingual English speakers and ‘mainstream’ Americans is threatened.”[387]

In the cartoon, SB1167 works alongside House Bill (HB) 2281, a bill that effectively outlawed ethnic studies in public education. The law, which was deemed unconstitutional in 2017 after the tireless work of activists, forbade school districts from including classes that were “designed primarily for pupils of a particular ethnic group” or that “promote[d] the overthrow of the United States government” or “promote[d] resentment toward a race or

[386] SB 1167 has a long history in the state of Arizona under various titles. A version of this bill, Proposition 106, was passed in 1988 and required that all state business be conducted in English. At the time it was passed, Proposition 106 was the most restrictive English-only legislation in the country. Proposition 106 was later overturned by the Arizona supreme court in 1998 because it violated individuals’ First Amendment right to free speech. For a long history of anti-immigration bills in the state of Arizona, I draw from Elise M. DuBord, *Language, Immigration, and Labor: Negotiating Work in the US-Mexico Borderlands* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014), 47.

[387] DuBord, *Language, Immigration, and Labor*, 49.

class of people."[388] The language of HB 2281—which sounds very similar to the language being used to ban Critical Race Theory (CRT) (or the easily scapegoated specter of what conservatives believe CRT to be)—operates under the implicit assumption that Whiteness is neutral, innocent, and invisible. So much of US history in public education upholds narratives about White men's exceptionalism, ignoring the ways that the US was built on the annexation and extraction of stolen land, the genocide of Indigenous peoples, the enslavement of Africans and the continuation of anti-Black racism, and the exploitation of undocumented immigrants. HB 2281 disregards the fact that so many of US history courses are indeed designed to uphold White supremacy while also assuming that ethnic studies courses are designed for a minority of students rather than education that is necessary for all students. Given that Latinx people are the majority minority in the US and that Latinx students make up half of K-12 public school students in Arizona, the notion that ethnic studies courses are designed for a minority of students neglects the changing population of the US and its public schools and reveals a troubling investment in national mythologies of Whiteness.[389] Ethnic studies courses have long redressed many of the historical gaps, absences, and inaccuracies within public education curriculum and are indeed necessary education for *all* students, particularly White students who have a vested interest in holding onto their racial innocence and ignorance.

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[388] Arizona House of Representatives, "HB 2281," *Arizona State Legislature*, May 3, 2010, accessed July 3, 2020, *https://www.azleg.gov/legtext/49leg/2r/summary/h.hb2281_05-03-10_astransmittedtogovernor.doc.htm#:~:text=HB%202281%20prohibits%20a%20school,race%2*[388]0or%20class%20of%20people.

[389] Aldama refers to Latinos as the "majority minority," saying, "we're 18-plus present of the US population." Aldama, *Latinx Superheroes in Mainstream Comics*, 3. See also Griselda Zetino, "Latinos make up half of K-12 public school students in Arizona," *KTAR News*, October 1, 2018, accessed July 3, 2020, https://ktar.com/story/2240584/latinos-make-up-half-of-k-12-public-school-students-in-arizona/.

The cartoon's non-fictional references to Arpaio, SB 1070, and HB 2281 ask readers to draw on their real-time, real-world knowledge of Arizona's border politics so that they can be in on the cartoon's joke. This knowledge creates a double payoff. It allows the reader to not only understand the cartoon's content and humor but also to feel a sense of kinship with the cartoonist as the reader takes on their critical perspective through the framing of the cartoon and joins in on a laugh directed at the object of critique. For readers who do not immediately recognize the references, the cartoon has an educational function, encouraging them to go outside of the cartoon to find the necessary information to make sense of it. The non-fictional references amplify the stakes of the rhetorical "feedback loop among authorial agency, textual phenomena, and reader response," not only communicating the artist's purpose but also extending to the reader a sense of exclusivity, community, and insider-knowledge.[390] (Phelan & Rabinowitz 32).[i] Rebecca Wanzo theorizes how editorial cartoons invite their readers into a critical perspective through a "triangulated interpretive structure":

> Cartoons using a triangulated structure depict a subjected person or event of interest and also show someone else's reaction to that person or thing. Some other referent in the cartoon then positions the reader to make the commentator the true object of the satire. Editorial cartoons often use this structure to criticize power relationships, indicting the perspective of the powerful and aligning the viewer with a different gaze. Language often provides the irony that contextualizes the image.[391]

García's cartoon centers a spectacularized caricature of Arpaio's "America's Toughest Sheriff" performance and Arizona's border politics, illustrating the violence and destruction of both through cactus' gnashing teeth, careless gunshots, trail of gasoline, and violent ("WACK!") kick. The reader sees this cactus character through three different responses,

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[390] James Phelan and Peter J. Rabinowitz, "Authors, Narrators, Narration," in *Narrative Theory: Core Concepts & Critical Debates*, co-written and edited by David Herman, James Phelan, Peter J. Rabinowitz, Brian Richardson, and Robyn Warhol (Columbus: The Ohio State University Press, 2012), 32.

[391] Rebecca, Wanzo. *The Content of Our Caricature: African American Comic Art and Political Belonging* (New York: New York University Press, 2020), 20.

Lady Liberty, the "Drug Dealer," and Uncle Sam, and their positions are clarified through their dialogue. These three characters not only offer different perspectives on Arizona's anti-immigration and anti-immigrant legislation but also position the reader to be a part of the satirical humor and align their own views with the critical consciousness of the comic.

Documenting Undocumented Epistemology

Whereas García's pointed editorial cartoons offer a structural critique of policies and laws that create the category of "undocumented" to exploit and criminalize immigrants, Ledesma's cartoons highlight the more personal effects of this status and the ways that it gives undocumented individuals a critical awareness of the systems and institutions they navigate. Ledesma's *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer: Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life* uses visual vignettes—single-panel cartoons that incorporate verbal narrative within the frame—to document an undocumented epistemology. Ledesma reference to his "pre-American life" in the title of his book recognizes the material benefits of citizenship without reifying strict boundaries between his undocumented and documented experiences. Even as he uses the language of documentation, Ledesma recognizes that "undocumented" is a euphemism that "obfuscates the reality of economic migration" and "values papers and stamps and hides the fact that only our limbs are allowed to be present in this economy."[392] Ledesma's *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* is critical of prioritizing one's legal status over their humanity, recalling undocuactivists' calls that "no human is illegal." Like Ledesma, I too am skeptical of how the language of documentation might obscure both the oppressive structures that create this status and the individual experiences and identities of those who fall into this category. I use the term "undocumented" throughout this paper, recognizing its

[392] Alberto Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer* (Columbus: Mad Creek Books, 2017), 93.

limitations, to contest criminalizing or alienating language that continues to circulate in discourses of US citizenship and because of the increasing recognizability of the term "undocumented" within activist settings.

Ledesma's visual vignettes are situated within the historical and material realities of undocumented Latinxs, yet they also highlight how these lived experiences inform an epistemological perspective poised to critique commonsense understandings of labor, capital, and nation. Ledesma's "Undocumented Alphabet" showcases this epistemology; each letter of the alphabet is featured in a single panel that explicates a different aspect of undocumented epistemology. Here Ledesma's single-panel form playfully evokes the children's ABCs storybook, a format that might educate some and affirm others.

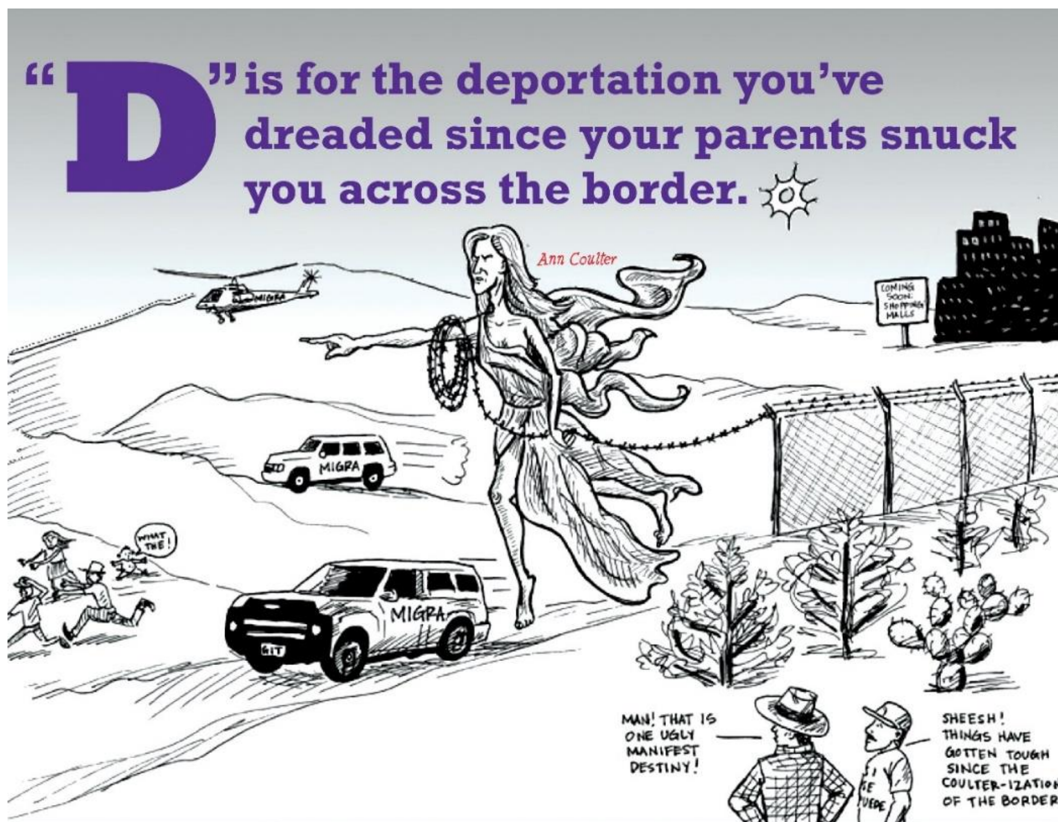

Figure 20. Two Latinos look on as Ann Coulter in the garb of Lady Liberty and a caravan of "Migra" agents chase a family past the boundary of the US-Mexico border. Alberto Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer: Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*, (Columbus: Mad Creek Books, 2017), 78. Image courtesy of Ohio State University Press.

Riffing on the pedagogical function of the ABC book, Ledesma critiques the visual cultures and mythologies that uphold colonial borders, declaring: "D' is for the DEPORTATION you've dreaded since your parents snuck you across the border."[393] A monstrously large figure in the center of the page carries the barbed wire of the border fence, and she admonishingly points her arm outward, directing a trail of La Migra's vans and helicopters as they chase a family out of the US (see Fig. 20). Ledesma uses labeling, an element common to editorial cartooning, to make clear the portrayal of Ann Coulter, the right-wing figurehead who has vocally advocated for racist and xenophobic anti-immigration and anti-immigrant policies. The two characters in the bottom right corner provide a critical spectatorship and commentary on the grotesque spectacle before them. One man notes how "Things have gotten tough since the Coulter-ization of the border." Another man exclaims, "Man! That is one ugly manifest destiny!"[394] Through this man's evocation of manifest destiny, the idea that White settlers had a divine right to expand Westward, Ledesma connects the violence of national expansion and ongoing settler colonialism to the politics of national exclusion. Similar to Miranda's evocation of Gloria Anzaldúa's Mestiza Nation, the man's exclamation draws out the complex geographies and histories of the border and the coalitional consciousness it creates.

[393] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 78.

[394] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 78.

Figure 21. John Gast, *American Progress*, 1872, Chromolithograph by George A. Croffut, Prints and Photographs Division, Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/resource/ppmsca.09855/.

Alongside the pointed commentary of the man's dialogue, the structure of the cartoon reappropriates the visual cultures of manifest destiny by evoking John Gast's 1872 painting *American Progress* (see Fig. 21), a piece of popular culture that was reprinted and widely circulated in its time. It portrays a Columbia figure leading White settlers westward as they chase Indigenous peoples out of their homelands. Here, the visual iconography reveals the way that White femininity gets wielded in racist and colonialist projects of expansion and exclusion. While in Ledesma's cartoon Ann Coulter, also in the garb of Columbia, walks with the barbed wire of the border fence, Gast's female figure carries with her the lines of the telegraph. By mimicking Gast's painting and explicitly evoking popular media, Ledesma

connects the ideologies of manifest destiny that were used to justify national expansion to criminalizing discourses of citizenship that are used to justify national exclusion.

Ledesma uses the border, as both the subject of the cartoon and a formal and focalizing device, to situate deportation within larger geopolitical dynamics while also attending to its material consequences. An ominous building looms in the background on the edge of the right border with a sign advertising, "Coming soon: shopping malls," reminding readers of the role of neoliberal global capitalism in immigration policy and border politics. The juxtaposition of the shopping mall sign with the image of the family fleeing on the opposite side of the cartoon dramatizes the complex dynamics that Tanya Maria Golash-Boza describes when she states, "Globalization, enhanced by neoliberal reforms, facilitates the movement of capital across borders, while restricting the mobility of workers."[395] In Ledesma's cartoon, the leading line of the border fence links the fleeing family to the shadow of the shopping mall, connecting these phenomena through its visual form. At the same time, Ledesma's cartoon underscores the epistemological perspectives of those most impacted by these border politics and invites readers into their critical reframing of citizenship and national belonging.

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[395] Tanya Maria Golash-Boza, *Deported: Immigrant Policing, Disposable Labor, and Global Capitalism* (New York: New York University Press, 2015), 4.

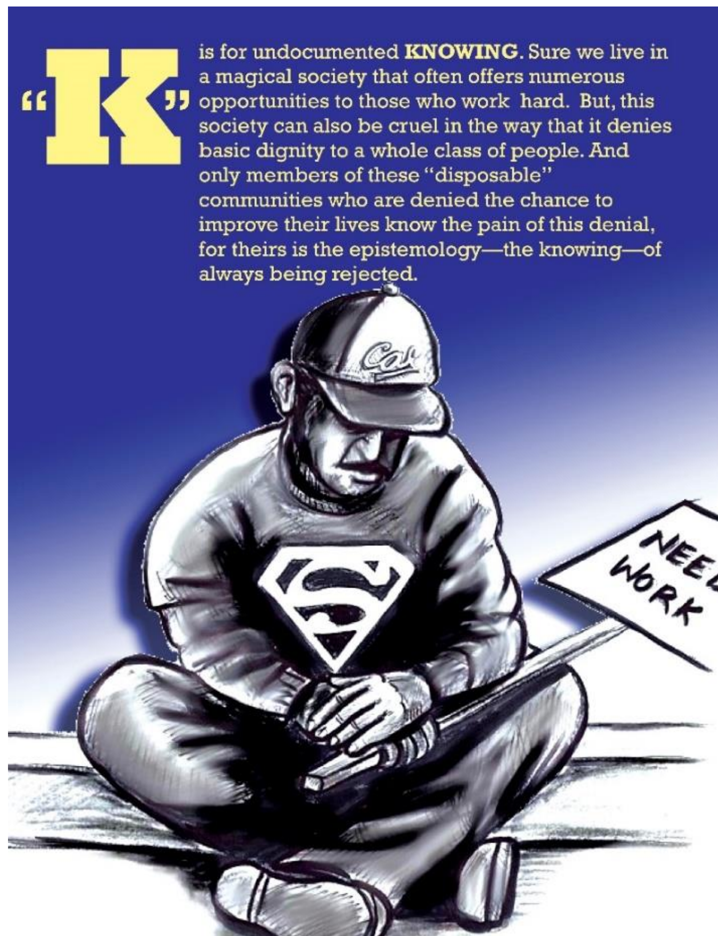

Figure 22. Alberto Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer: Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*, (Columbus: Mad Creek Books, 2017), 83. Image courtesy of Ohio State University Press.

In the panel for "K" (see Fig. 22), which is for "undocumented KNOWING," Ledesma challenges bootstrap narratives that promote the myth of meritocracy in order to obscure how economic and sociopolitical structures rely on exploitation in order to support the success of a small minority of people, predominantly White men who have access to full citizenship and capital.[396] The panel critiques the way that the US "denies basic dignity to a whole class of people," seeing them only for their labor and, thus, as "disposable."[397] The

[396] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 83.

[397] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 83.

epistemological effects of this exploitation are highlighted in the cartoon's verbal narration: "And only members of these 'disposable' communities who are denied the chance to improve their lives know the pain of this denial, for theirs is the epistemology—the knowing—of always being rejected."[398] Those who the US has deemed "disposable" build a critical awareness through their proximity to the pain of exploitation and rejection. The image of a man sitting on the sidewalk looking down at his folded hands which grip a "Need Work" sign further illustrate this "pain of denial."[399] A University of California, Berkeley "Cal" hat guards his gaze and on the chest of his sweatshirt is the Superman shield. While the image is not necessarily Ledesma, the artist did receive both his undergraduate and doctorate degrees from the University of California, Berkeley, so he draws from or at least alludes to his own biography, as he does throughout the text, to challenge singular images about who an undocumented immigrant is and what they know.[ii] The Superman iconography on the man's chest calls to mind idealized popular images of the superhero citizen. As Wanzo argues, even as he is from another planet and thus "alien" to Earth), Superman represents "the ideal 'universal outsider' [. . .] a caricature of ideal citizenship" that coheres around his White masculinity.[400] Putting the Superman symbol on an undocumented figure evokes this caricature of ideal citizenship in order to place it against the stark dehumanization of working in a nation that refuses to officially recognize you. The superman shield juts forth from the visceral realism of the image, an image that evokes the sights of homelessness that many city dwellers see daily and likely ignore. In short, or rather in a single panel, the image reveals the

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[398] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 83.

[399] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 83.

[400] Wanzo, *The Content of Our Caricature*, 17.

fragile facade of idealized American citizenship. The Cal hat, the superhero shield, and the "Need Work" sign might seem to be in tension, but Ledesma triangulates these images to paint a complex portrayal of the contradictions that contour undocumented experience. Speaking to the power of showing multiple narratives of undocumented experience, Ledesma declares, "To view undocumented immigrant experience in the US as a totally unredeemable experience that needs to be excised without mercy is to buy into a false equivalency that has already stopped us from discerning what is lawful versus what is just."[401] Ledesma's use of superhero iconography throughout his work draws out the dignity of undocumented individuals as it simultaneously critiques the exclusionary mythologies of American citizenship that the superhero embodies.

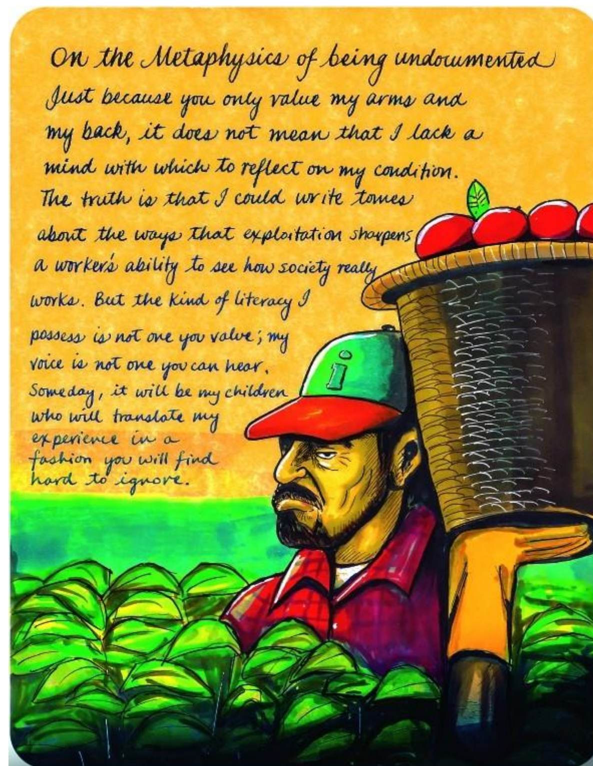

Figure 23. Alberto Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer: Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life*, (Columbus: Mad Creek Books, 2017), 5. Image courtesy of Ohio State University Press.

[401] Alberto Ledesma, "Doodling as Activism: How I Produced My Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer." *Latinxs in Kid Lit*, May 3, 2018, accessed July 5, 2020, https://latinosinkidlit.com/2018/05/03/doodling-as-activism-how-i-produced-my-diary-of-a-reluctant-dreamer/.

The vignette entitled "On the Metaphysics of Being Undocumented" emblematizes how the single-panel frame can illuminate questions of epistemology (see Fig. 23). The cartoon shows an undocumented farmworker whose torso emerges from and towers over a canopy of trees. He holds a basket of fruit atop his shoulder. The full text reads:

> On the Metaphysics of being undocumented[:] Just because you only value my arms and my back, it does not mean that I lack a mind with which to reflect on my condition. The truth is that I could write tomes about the ways that exploitation sharpens a worker's ability to see how society really works. But the kind of literacy I possess is not one you value; my voice is not one you can hear. Someday, it will be my children who will translate my experiences in a fashion you find hard to ignore.[402]

Ledesma draws out how the experience of exploitation gives the undocumented worker a precise understanding of the conditions of their own lives. Their experiences have sharpened their "ability to see how society really works," and they understand acutely the contradiction of living in a nation that exploits your labor but disavows your presence and political participation. While the US might only see undocumented individuals for their labor, Ledesma willfully geometrizes the visual elements of the image to re-envision the undocumented worker. The material conditions of his work are present in the trees that surround him at the bottom of the page, but rather than being enveloped by those conditions, the worker literally rises above them, emerging with a critical perspective. At the same time, the weight of the work itself is still present in the large basket that the man holds atop his shoulder. The image visually reminds the reader of the sustenance his labor generates and maintains—a reminder of how the labor of undocumented individuals literally sustains the nation and puts food on the table.

The image highlights the physical weight of the work while the verbal narration points to the weight of translating this experience. Ledesma's single-panel vignette illustrates

[402] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 5.

how the form is uniquely situated to illuminate or “translate,” as Ledesma says, an undocumented epistemology. Jesse Cohn argues that what is fundamentally at stake in the comics page is epistemology, “a subject position that comes to govern how we are given to see, to understand, and to know the world so narrated.”[403] The comics panel does not merely offer a window into the past nor does it act as a mirror that reflects the present. Instead, through framing, the comics panel performs historical and national narratives as creative acts of production that are unresolved and open for interpretation. Ledesma strategically positions his verbal narrative within the single frame to illuminate the ways in which the conditions of being undocumented create a unique epistemological perspective and subjectivity—one that deconstructs the very systems of postmodern global capitalism and racist xenophobia that create the category of “undocumented” in the first place.

Chela Sandoval’s “differential consciousness” theorizes how this epistemological perspective is both created by and holds the possibility for unraveling postmodern global capitalism and its neocolonial forces. She theorizes differential consciousness as a “dialectical modulation between forms of consciousness [that] permits functioning within, yet beyond, the demands of dominant ideology: the practitioner breaks with ideology while also speaking in and from within ideology. The differential form of oppositional consciousness thus is composed of narrative worked self-consciously.”[404] Ledesma’s narrator speaks from within and beyond their position as “undocumented” worker and talks back to the structures that exploit their labor and make them precarious. The cartoon’s self-conscious

[403] Jesse Cohn, “Mise-en-Page: A Vocabulary for Page Layouts,” in *Teaching the Graphic Novel*, ed. by Stephen E. Tabachnick (New York: The Modern Language Association of America, 2009), 56.

[404] Chela Sandoval, *Methodology of the Oppressed* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2000), 63.

narrator translates the literacy and knowledge of the individual, one that they recognize is not valued within dominant culture but will have to be translated by their children "in a fashion you will find hard to ignore."[405] The single panel performs both the methodology and the epistemology of an undocumented differential consciousness, reworking the ideological narratives that mark individuals as "undocumented" in the first place.

Eric García's and Alberto Ledesma's single-panel cartoons illustrate the aesthetic affordances of the single-panel form, one that certainly merits more attention in definition and theories of comics. More than this, though, they strategically use the form to reframe their reader's point of view and raise a differential consciousness that can contest the US's criminalization of immigrants. García's pointed editorial cartoons offer a structural critique of the policies and laws that create the need for immigration to the US and then make those immigrants increasingly vulnerable and precarious by foreclosing pathways to citizenship, exploiting their labor, and criminalizing their language and existence. His triangulation of iconic figures, familiar scenarios, and narrative framing invite the reader to participate in the cartoon's humor and ideological critique. Alberto Ledesma's visual vignettes and undocumented alphabet highlights the epistemological perspective of undocumented individuals, using the single-panel frame to highlight how their differential consciousness is developed out of and responds to their material conditions. Ledesma, who began cartooning to help his students understand the complexities of undocumented experience, explains how the form might be uniquely situated to distill political realities:

> Of course, now that I think about it, a lot of the responses that I generated were due to the form in which I relayed my message. As the saying goes— "a picture is worth a thousand words." Here I was rendering figurative essays with the cartoons that I was drawing. My students were also used to looking at political cartoons that had complex messages, so they were able to decode difficult concepts rather quickly. Ironically,

[405] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 5.

> the goal that I had of "illustrating" what the undocumented immigrant experiences was like when I was a young scholar, of showing how undocumented immigration is another kind of American experience, I was suddenly able to do that with cartoons.[406]

The primacy of image in comics allows them to render complex ideological critiques efficiently and effectively on the page, and the single-panel form condenses and amplifies those possibilities. These artists bring the material realities of the US-Mexico border and the US's criminal and criminalizing immigration policies into view for their readers and, in doing so, give readers a blueprint for reorienting how they see and, thus, imagine citizenship. recognizability of the term "undocumented" within activist settings.

[406] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 7.

Coda

Coalitional Glimpses of Belonging

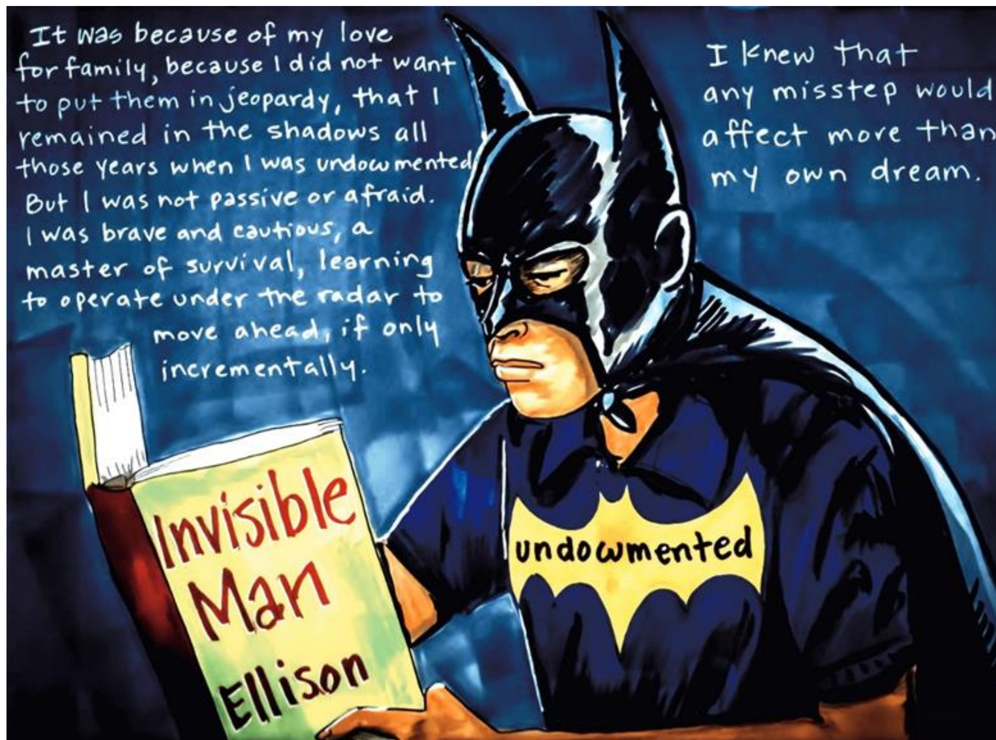

Figure 24. Alberto Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer: Undocumented Vignettes from a Pre-American Life* (Columbus: Mad Creek Books, 2017), 38. Image courtesy of Ohio State University Press.

In this image from Alberto Ledesma's *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, the status of "undocumented" becomes a heroic title that adorns the Batman emblem on the figure's chest as they read Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, a text that bookends this project. The cartoon offers a glimpse into the coalitional aesthetics and affinities in which this multiethnic project is invested. The image announces the undocumented individual as both a superhero and a scholar. The Batman mask and cape provides the protection of anonymity, a requisite of so many masked vigilantes, yet the inclusion of Ellison's *Invisible Man* gives the costume a slightly different valence. It signals anonymity or (in)visibility as a strategic positionality and critical consciousness, an epistemological location through which one looks out on the world,

just as the figure gazes through the slits of their mask onto the text in from of them. Placing the popular iconography of the superhero alongside canonical weight of *Invisible Man*, Ledesma links, but does not necessarily elide, differently racialized experiences of citizenship and national belonging. The verbal text of the image links the experience of being undocumented and "in the shadows," as Ledesma describes, to that of being rendered "invisible" within an anti-Black society.[407] Ledesma, who draws from his own biography throughout the text, explains how he remained "in the shadows" to protect himself and his family.[408] Yet, he highlights his agency from within the shadows, asserting, "But I was not passive or afraid. I was brave and cautious, a master of survival, learning to operate under the radar to move ahead, if only incrementally."[409] Like Ellison's Invisible Man, who hibernates in the abandoned basement of an apartment building waiting for the right time to emerge and act, Ledesma strategically uses his own (in)visibility as a strategy of survival and a source of knowledge.[410] He is not only a "master of survival" but the master of his own narrative and his own image. Ledesma's undocumented superhero scholar reveals the racialized contradictions of citizenship, a category that renders all too many (in)visible, while also noting the cross-racial coalitions and subversive possibilities that these experiences of estrangement create.

Visual Poetics, Racial Politics: Seeing Citizenship in Multiethnic U.S. Literatures traces these contradictions and coalitions. While the category of citizen is fluid and flexible, shifting to adapt to the racial discourses and national anxieties of its moment, it cuts across

[407] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 38.

[408] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 38.

[409] Ledesma, *Diary of a Reluctant Dreamer*, 38.

[410] Ralph Ellison, *Invisible Man, 13*.

racialized communities in precise ways, enacting very real exclusion and material violence. These boundaries of inclusion and exclusion are compelled through racialized ways of seeing that are co-created by and circulated through visual culture. Yet, just as the experience of citizenship is never fixed, the political uses and culture work of images are always in flux. By collaging word and image through their multimedia aesthetics, the visual poetics of the works I have examined create a shifting canvas through which to represent the cracks within citizenship's unifying façade. Rather than attempt to fill those fractured spaces and fit themselves into normative national frameworks of inclusion, these authors and artists leave the seams of their work visible, not in some Frankenstein-like recreation of citizenship but in a new reimagining of what collective and political belonging can be. It is in these moments of disjuncture, where the collaging of visual and literary aesthetics does not unify into a monolithic image but rather into a mosaic of fragmented yet whole pieces, that I see glimmers of coalition.

These opportunities and affinities are echoed throughout this work, as the visual poetics I examine call forth and listen to one another. The visual aesthetics and epistemologies of (in)visibility that Ellison initiates get picked up in some shape or form in each of the texts I engage. The homage to Zora Neale Hurston's explication of what it feels like to be thrown against a "sharp white background" likewise reemerges in my reading of both *Invisible Man* and *Citizen*. The punctuated pauses, whether through the use of punctuation or the interruption of image, that I trace in the first three chapters challenge the linear timeline of "American Progress," the image of which was circulated throughout the US in the late nineteenth and early-twentieth century in the form of John Gast's painting of the same name. It is this image of "manifest destiny" that both Miranda and Ledesma critique in

their work, which points to the unnatural divisions and colonial impositions of national borders. Each of the authors and artists I examine hack into citizenship's visual tropes, artifacts, cultures, and iconography and recontextualize them through their own visual, multimedia forms to rewrite and redraw their meaning. These visual poetics do not provide windows into the racialized contours of citizenship but instead offer ephemeral portals through which readers might momentarily see citizenship differently and picture more robust frameworks of belonging beyond its narrow vision.

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