

Notes & Bibliography - “Truth(s) Be Told: Citizenship & Composite Counterstories”

John Edgar Wideman’s novel *Philadelphia Fire* (1990), inspired by the 1985 police bombing of a West Philadelphia row house headquartering a Black liberation group, features the author’s real correspondence with a relative of victims of the bombing (124-5). In *Fanon* (2008), a novelization of the life of postcolonial theorist Franz Fanon, Wideman breaks from conventional structure with Igbo folklore (8,15,25), quotes from a W.E.B. Du Bois (34-5), quotes from Frantz Fanon himself (17-9,71,169), and entire segments of Wideman’s personal reflections on the process of writing the book.

Valeria Luiselli employs similar disruptions in her collaborative novel *The Story of My Teeth* (2015), and in *Lost Children Archive* (2019) which incorporates topographical maps, governmental documents and other legal texts to examine ongoing American policy of separating children from their parents at the Mexican-American border.

In *The Sympathizer*, Viet Ngyuen incorporates a similar composite counter-storytelling by injecting passages from *Kubark*, a Central Intelligence Agency interrogation manual (283-4, 344). This leads readers to consider how these interrogation techniques might have been perfected on American soil, potentially on U.S. citizens and nationals. Ngyuen also inserts a quote from Fodor’s *Southeast Asia*, an American travel guide (147). Ngyuen uses the passage to illustrate how the U.S. has helped produce and disseminate narratives that have attempted to define the identities of people of color around the world.

In her novel *Everything I Never Told You*, Celeste Ng interjects italicized verbiage from Virginia 1955 statute in *Naim v. Naim* meant “to preserve the racial integrity of its citizens” and to prevent “the corruption of blood.” Essentially, this law excluded the right to equal protection to any person born in Virginia to parents from different races.

Nana Kwame Adjei-Brenyah’s *Chain-Gang All-Stars*, employs footnotes to highlight injustices committed by the U.S. government. These footnotes include references to the American Constitution and legal citations of court cases and federal statutes--Title 18 of the United States Code (56,109,146, 232).

Also included in *Watershed*’s use of secondary sources are reports from FBI interventions of civil rights organizations. This conveys how the U.S. government has actively worked to prevent some citizens the right to build coalitions that might offer them protection from state sanctioned violence (114, 123-4).

Throughout *Watershed*, Robert is reminded of the Buffalo Soldiers, the Black cavalry regiments of the U.S. Army. Formed in 1866, these groups of African American servicemen were

dispatched by the U.S. government to battle Native American tribes. The soldiers have been celebrated as patriots achieving a level of heroism once reserved for white male citizens. However, these Black regiments contributed to violent expansionist goals of the U.S. government. The Buffalo Soldiers gained greater recognition, differentiating themselves as active citizens at the expense of Native American lives and other minorities residing within American borders. Members of the Plata Reservation ask Robert if he is a Buffalo Soldier, questioning his allegiance to a nation that has a history of using him as a tool for conquest over other people of color (35, 53, 69).

Alexander G. Weheliye's *Habeas Viscus: Racializing Assemblages, Biopolitics, and Black Feminist Theories of the Humans* is described as being in the "same conceptual borough as Agamben's bare life," but calls on Black Studies to provide explanations of how "techniques of domination, dispossession, expropriation, and violence are predicated upon the hierarchical ordering of racial, gender, sexual, economic, religious, and national differences" (1-3). Weheliye's work explores how "blackness designates a changing system of unequal power structures that apportion and delimit which humans can lay claim to full human status and which humans cannot" (3).

It is important to note that Weheliye argues against the distinction of assemblage texts as "unavoidably positive or liberating particularly when set against putatively rigid structures such as race and colonialism" and rejects using words like "agency" or "resistance" when discussing the work of these forms. Weheliye suggests that assemblages do not assume change (47).

In Homi Bhaba's foreword to Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, he presents the following question, "Without the rights of representation and participation, in the *public* sphere, can the subject ever be a citizen in the true sense of the term?" (xxiv). Bhaba goes on to question the legitimacy and virtue of a republic in which the "colonized citizen" is prevented from exercising collective and communal agency as equal members of society. He writes that, "formal citizenship-without-equality" is an "unresolvable embarrassment within the ideals and ideologies of the civilizing mission" (xxiv).

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