Claremont Colleges
Scholarship @ Claremont

CGU Theses & Dissertations CGU Student Scholarship

Spring 2023

Paul R. Williams at Work in Photographs: Tarrying With Cites/Sights/Sites of Trouble

Denise M. Johnson

Follow this and additional works at: https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_etd

Part of the African American Studies Commons, Art and Design Commons, History Commons, and the History of Art, Architecture, and Archaeology Commons

Recommended Citation
Johnson, Denise M.. (2023). *Paul R. Williams at Work in Photographs: Tarrying With Cites/Sights/Sites of Trouble*. CGU Theses & Dissertations, 536. https://scholarship.claremont.edu/cgu_etd/536.

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the CGU Student Scholarship at Scholarship @ Claremont. It has been accepted for inclusion in CGU Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of Scholarship @ Claremont. For more information, please contact scholarship@claremont.edu.

Paul R. Williams at Work in Photographs: Tarrying with Cites/Sights/Sites of Trouble

By

Denise M. Johnson

Claremont Graduate University
2023

© Copyright Denise M. Johnson, 2023.
All right reserved

Approval of the Dissertation Committee

This dissertation has been duly read, reviewed, and critiqued by the Committee listed below, which hereby approves the manuscript of Denise M. Johnson as fulfilling the scope and quality requirements for meriting the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Cultural Studies.

Dr. Darrell Moore, Chair
Claremont Graduate University
Visiting Associate Professor of Cultural Studies

Dr. Maria Elena Buszek
University of Colorado, Denver
Professor of Visual Arts

Dr. Nadine Chan
University of Toronto
Assistant Professor of Cinema Studies

Dr. David K. Seitz
Harvey Mudd College
Assistant Professor of Cultural Geography

Abstract

Paul R. Williams at Work in Photographs: Tarrying with Cites/Sights/Sites of Trouble
By
Denise M. Johnson

Claremont Graduate University: 2023

Ariella Azoulay and W. J. T. Mitchell have called for a new users' manual for photographs, urging that theory finally wrest itself from the authoritative singular gaze of the patriarchal imperial photographer so that the plurality inherent within the ontology of viewing photographs be engaged. Azoulay cogently argues that the photographer is not the only person to act when a photographic event takes place. By turning critical analysis to the photographic subject and advising viewers to both watch and listen to photographs rather than gaze, a space of appearance is activated in which the photographic subject engages in dialogue with the viewer while opening a civil contract between them. In the civil space of photography, the viewer is called upon to act. Azoulay, arguing with Hannah Arendt and against Roland Barthes, finds photographs to be capable of operating outside hierarchies of power, time, and space, and thus, considers photographs to hold the potential of being useful extensions of citizenship and the right to have rights. Joining this work, *Paul R. Williams at Work in Photographs: Tarrying with Cites/Sights/Sites of Trouble* develops an analytic formula aimed at illuminating the function and operation of political trouble in occupation photographs of 20th century Los Angeles architect, Paul R. Williams. The *sights cubed* formula will tarry with Williams's *cites* – references derived from, and reverberations concerning the performance of political trouble in photographs of Williams at work; the *sight*s and *sight lines* established within occupation photographs of

Williams in the dulcet practice of political trouble; and the operation of space or *sites* in which Williams's trouble is enacted. This dissertation argues that although Williams's troubling of racism, segregation and inequality is not strident, through occupation portraits he engages in an aestheticization of citizenship that nonetheless works to undermine, rupture, and disrupt the forces of racism at play within the field of architecture and adjacent during the 20th century. When this work is attended to, the dissertation concludes, Williams's communities of remembrance are called upon to engage in the work of myth making, legacy building, and memorializing, to counter the threat of social death.

Dedication

This work is dedicated to my grandmother, Dorothy F. Banda, who taught me to love photographs and coupled watching photos with resistance for me at an early age; to the love of my life, Chad Johnson, who has long tolerated my “picture fests” with great generosity; and to my boys, Lucas and Jake – photographs of you will always be my favorites.

Acknowledgements

The Acknowledgements that open scholarly works are among my favorite things to read. Even when the writer takes great care to be objective and concise, these sections most often are full of love, humility, and careful recognition of the enormity of scholarly work. That they are placed at the beginning of a text is a testimony to the work of communities of remembrance and the fact that no scholar can undertake serious research alone, or in solitude. As such, I've been careful to keep notes along the way to be sure to give thanks to the many people who have helped me develop, extend, and revise this project. Nonetheless, I know that these reflections cannot articulate my incredible gratitude. If I have inadvertently neglected to credit someone here, please know that I intend to carry my thanks forward, to give indulgently, and to meet challenges with the plentiful kindness that I have benefited from while writing this dissertation.

My research was supported by a Dissertation Fellowship with an Honorable Mention distinction and a Fernandez Prize in Cultural Studies from Claremont Graduate University. Coursework in the Cultural Studies program at CGU was tremendous, but Dr. Moore's *Genealogies of Freedom* course and workshops, as well as Dr. Chan's *Durable Empires: Praxis* course were incredibly generative for this dissertation. It cannot go without saying that I am sincerely thankful to each of my committee members, Dr. Moore, Dr. Maria Elena Buszek, Dr. Chan, and Dr. Seitz for their earnest support, capacious intellect, and belief in my abilities to carry this through.

My inquiries to various institutions for often very minute information related to Paul R. Williams have been met with amazing curiosity and eagerness. My first jobs were in libraries, so my

gratitude to the following people is especially warm. I am very thankful for the assistance provided by the Librarians at the Honnold Mudd and Special Collections Libraries at the Claremont Colleges, particularly Cultural Studies Librarian, Nazia Islam and the incredibly patient librarian working the evening of November 17, 2022 who was able to locate the paper copy of Williams's "I Am a Negro" essay around that corner, in the library hallway that I didn't know existed. I am so sorry that I didn't get your name! Luis Gonzalez and Simon Elliott in the Special Collections Library at UCLA provided extended assistance in the search to identify the photographer of Williams's occupation photograph with executives from Golden State Mutual Insurance Company, while the Research and Reference Services Division of the Library of Congress and Jeff Croteau, Director of Library & Archives for the Scottish Rite Masonic Museum & Library offered enthusiastic help in locating a speech that Williams delivered to the Oakland, CA chapter of the Scottish Rite Masons. An unexpected email from Mary Velasco of Getty Images identifying Howard Morehead as the photographer of Williams's *Ebony* photograph from 1963 helped my project along, as did messages from Sally McKay and Tracey at the Getty Research Institute. While writing the dissertation, it was beyond exciting to receive a message from Royal Kennedy Rodgers offering her support and interest in the project. As well, I am genuinely happy to have connected with photographer, Janna Ireland who offered help locating Williams's West Adams bungalow and shared appreciation of Williams's work.

This journey has been long and thrilling, and along the way I have had countless invigorating conversations with friends, colleagues, and students who excitedly listened to my thoughts, encouraged me to go further, and never doubted that this dissertation would be written. Firstly, Dr. Wendy Salmond truly sparked the flame that set me on this path through her unyielding and

bountiful encouragement every step of the way. Her work (some of it political) suggesting my participation in Chapman University's Getty LA/LA project, *My Barrio: Emigdio Vasquez and Chicana/o Identity in Orange County* validated a long-held desire to return to graduate school and embark on the work of a doctoral degree while also helping me to generate the necessary chutzpah I needed to tap into to apply and tackle coursework while raising a family. An outgrowth of this work that I will always hold dear are the friendships that I built with colleagues Erin Pullin and Dr. Stephanie Takaragawa. You are my chorus and I'm so grateful to be able to hear your supportive songs – which is funny because I imagine you singing snarky Riot Grrrl songs mixed with ballads. With enormous warmth, I thank all of the students who have affirmed in so many ways that this was a worthwhile endeavor.

My crazy smart friends have helped me in innumerable ways. Julie Shafer's incredible work has ignited my thinking as a curator, writer, and scholar for decades. Julie's willingness to tarry through ideas, and the generosity with which they took on the mean task of doing a final read of this dissertation cannot be repaid. Our friendship means the world to me. Always deeply thoughtful and giving, my restoration ecologist and artist friend, Jessica Rath helped me through so many conceptual, textual, and health log jams that I quickly lost count of them. Thank you for keeping me afloat and for hearing me with so much care. My beautiful friends Candace and Brian Majeska, Alex Insua, Anthony Mathalia, Vincent Kowal, Claudia Castillo, Jennifer Fukunaga, Melissa Fukunaga, Beth Clary, Kelly Ford, and Michelle Dowd all gave me hope when I couldn't see through the fog and tears. My colleagues at Chapman University, Dr. Amy Buono, Dr. Anna Leahy, Lia Halloran, and Dr. Justin Walsh each helped me to find context and laughter when it stormed. My wonderful cohort at CGU, Arline Vortuba, Adrineh Gregorian,

Jessica Moss, Rachel Schmid, Kiandra Jimenez, Anisha Ahuja, and Joshua Mendez brought so much joy and heartfelt clarity to our studies. I will remember our collective conversations in the SAH Library with abundant fondness. And of course, my Loveds: my husband, Chad Johnson; my kiddos, Lucas and Jake; and their friends, especially Ryan Sovick, Kenedy Jacome, Daniel Edgmon, and Josue Alviar who cheered me on from day one. I can’t thank you enough, but I can give you much love!

Table of Contents

Approval of Dissertation Committee iii

Abstract iv

Dedication v

Acknowledgements vi

Photographs xii

Introduction Tarrying with *Cites*/*Sights*/*Sites* of Trouble 1

Trouble, Ruptures, and Counter-Histories 4

Analytic Approach for Watching and Hearing Political Trouble in Photographs 17

Methodologies 25

Chapter 1 *Cites* of Trouble: A Tool for Remaking the American Imagination 34

Seeing How a Slave Was Made a Man 40

Occupation Portraits 50

Citing Frederick Douglass 54

Chapter 2 *Sights* of Trouble: Trying to Be Remembered 64

Sight Lines 68

Invisible Man 76

The Space of Appearance 100

Action 108

Chapter 3 *Sites* of Trouble: Deserving a Place in the World 114

Deserving a Place in the World 118

Citizen Architect 137

Communities of Remembrance 144

Epilogue 150

Natality Against Mortality 153

Returning with a Remembering Eye 167

Appendix 170

Bibliography 170

Photographs

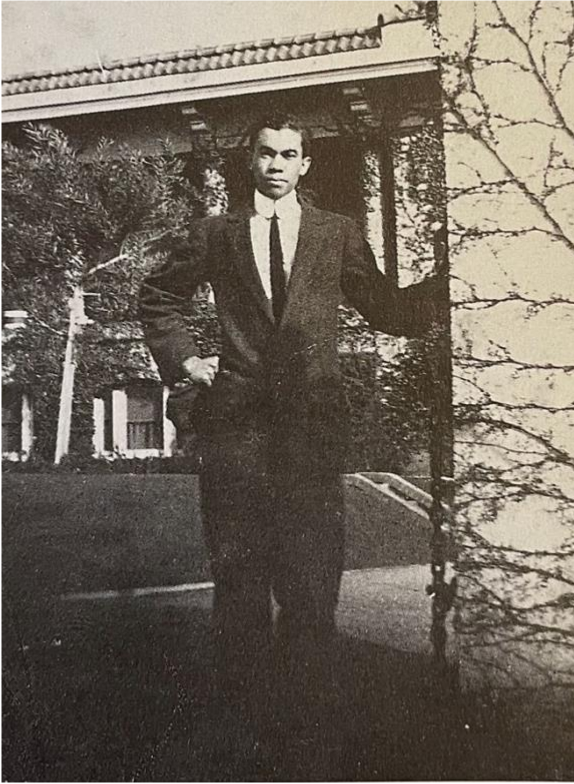

Figure 1. Unknown photographer, *Paul R. Williams*, 1927. Ojai, CA. Hudson, Karen E. *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*. New York: Rizzoli, 1993, 48.

Figure 2. Howard Morehead, *Paul R. Williams at Drawing Desk with Rendering*, 1963. *Ebony* magazine.

Figure 3. Judith Leyster, *Self-Portrait*, 1630. National Gallery of Art, Washington D.C.

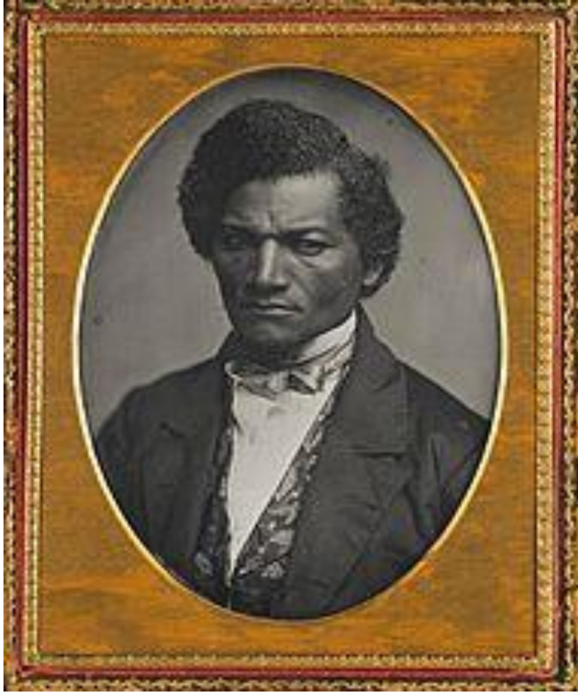

Figure 4. Samuel J. Miller, *Frederick Douglass*, c. 1847 – 1852. Daguerreotype. *The Art Institute of Chicago*, Creative Commons Zero designation, https://www.artic.edu/artworks/145681/frederick-douglass and https://www.artic.edu/image-licensing.

Figure 5. 28th Street YMCA Bas Relief of Frederick Douglass, 1926. Color photo, left: "Walking Through Time on LA's Central Avenue with Alison Rose Jefferson," Pomona College, July 17, 2018, https://www.pomona.edu/news/2018/07/17-walking-through-time-las-central-avenue-alison-rose-jefferson-80. Photo, right: Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*. New York: Rizzoli, 1993, 43.

59

I am a NEGRO

Here is the frankest, most human discussion of the color problem we have ever read

PHOTOGRAPH BY CARL VAN VECHTEN

BY PAUL WILLIAMS

I AM an architect.

Today I sketched the preliminary plans for a large country house which will be erected in one of the most beautiful residential districts in the world, a district of roomy estates, entrancing vistas, and stately mansions. Sometimes I have dreamed of living there. I could afford such a home.

But this evening, leaving my office, I returned to my own small, inexpensive home in an unrestricted, comparatively undesirable section of Los Angeles. Dreams cannot alter facts; I know that, for the preservation of my own happiness, I must always live in that locality, or in another like it, because . . .

I am a Negro.

As Associate Architect of the Federal Negro Housing Project, I maintain an office in Washington, D. C. At frequent intervals I make hurried trips to supervise the work which is being done there. Should I travel through the South, I must ride in the "Jim Crow" car. Now, the seats in that car are not less comfortable than those in any other car, and I have long since lost my first resentment against racial intolerance, yet, riding there, I should be reminded continually of the contempt in which I am held by the great majority of the white race, not as an individual, but because . . .

I am a Negro.

If, traveling through the North, I should attempt to stop in certain hotels or to dine in certain restaurants, or even to sit beside certain persons in a crowded streetcar, it is quite conceivable that I might be the cause of an "embarrassing situation," not through any word of mine or any deed of mine, but because . . .

I am a Negro.

These are in themselves little things, yet, added together, they acquire weight, for they are indicative of a general misunderstanding which is, I think, a serious handicap to the welfare of both races, white and black alike. In themselves, they are not issues; they are merely superficialities which pose a question:

Exactly what is my position in this nation which grants me the political rights of citizenship?

The true and complete answer is lost somewhere in a vague jumble of emotional theories and practical considerations which constitute the "race problem." On the one hand, the professed humanitarian delivers eloquent harangues about the "black brother" and talks of freedom and equality and universal love. On the other hand, the confirmed exponent of racial hatred and intolerance rises to dramatic heights in predicting dire catastrophe as the certain result of permitting a debased black population to flourish and multiply beside the white citizenry of America.

Both are extremists, both are emotionally intoxicated, both fail to grasp today's fundamental facts.

On the left are the disciples of sociology and biology, who prophesy that at some future stage in man's evolution all races—white, black, yellow, brown, and red—will be fused into a single, great, human race. On the right are the reactionaries who would damn a race today and through all of the tomorrows to come because it lived in savagery yesterday.

The one looks to a remote future, the other to the dead past. Both are inclined to overlook the practical problems of the immediate now.

Today's simple, unemotional fact is this:

I am a Negro.

I and the millions of men and women whose faces, like mine, are black, dream and plan and work and progress. Our brains receive and nourish new ideas, our hands develop new abilities. In the past we were ignorant slaves; in the future we shall be God knows what, but today we exist in a state of almost incredibly rapid change. We are nearly a tenth of the earth's population; we are more than a tenth of the population of the United States. And we are, when all is said and done, individuals, subject to the same laws which govern the mental and spiritual evolution of all individuals. We march forward singly, not as a race.

Deal with me, and with the other men and women of my race, as individual problems, not as a race problem, and the race problem will soon cease to exist!

I WAS born in Los Angeles, in a district which tolerated the residence of all races. As a child I played with white children without being conscious of the stigma attached to my color. Nothing prepared me for the shock of the discovery that some day those children who then accepted me as one of themselves would learn to treat me with a strange admixture of patronage and contempt, intolérance and condescension. There was nothing to warn me that coveted opportunities would be denied me because my face was black. I discovered the color line when I went out, as a schoolboy, to find a needed job.

I was turned away by would-be employers who, to my certain knowledge, needed help. At first I could not understand, but gradually I came to realize that I was being condemned, not by a lack of ability, (*Continued on page 161*)

Figure 6. Denise M. Johnson, "I Am a Negro" essay opening page from *The American Magazine*, July 1937, n. 1, v. 124, 59.

Figure 7. Carl Van Vechten, *Portrait of Paul R. Williams*, c. 1930s. Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*. New York: Rizzoli, 1993, frontispiece.

Figure 8. Unknown photographer, *Paul R. Williams with Golden State Insurance Company Executives*, Edgar Johnson, Norman Houston, and George Beavers and Model, c. 1948.

Figure 9. Julius Shulman, *Paul R. Williams in Los Angeles Office Next to Bookcase*, 1952.
© J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10). This image may be reproduced free of charge in print and/or electronic formats.

Figure 10. Julius Shulman, *Paul R. Williams with Client Pointing at Home Model*, 1952.
© J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10). This image may be reproduced free of charge in print and/or electronic formats.

Figure 11. Julie Shafer, *Paul R. Williams's Lafayette Square Home*, April 2023. Courtesy of the photographer.

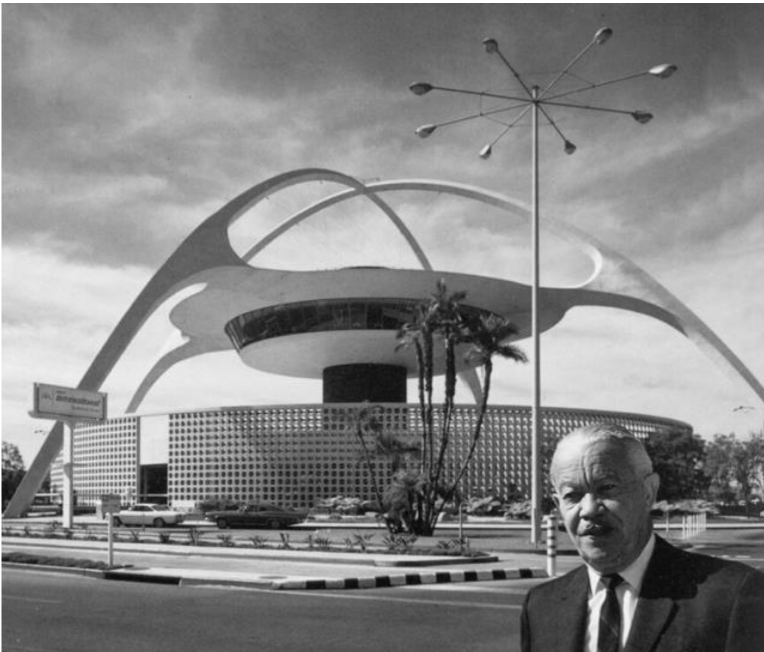

Figure 12. Julius Shulman, *Paul R. Williams in front of LAX Theme Building*, c. 1961. © J. Paul Getty Trust. Getty Research Institute, Los Angeles (2004.R.10). This image may be reproduced free of charge in print and/or electronic formats.

Figure 13. Unknown photographer, *Paul R. Williams with wife, Della Mae Williams, and Client*, c. 1930s. Lake Arrowhead, CA. Hudson, Karen E. *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*. New York: Rizzoli, 1993, 10.

Figure 14. Unknown photographer, *Paul R. Williams's West Adams Home*, c. 2021. "Paul Revere Williams House," *Los Angeles Conservancy*, https://www.laconservancy.org/issues/paul-revere-williams-house.

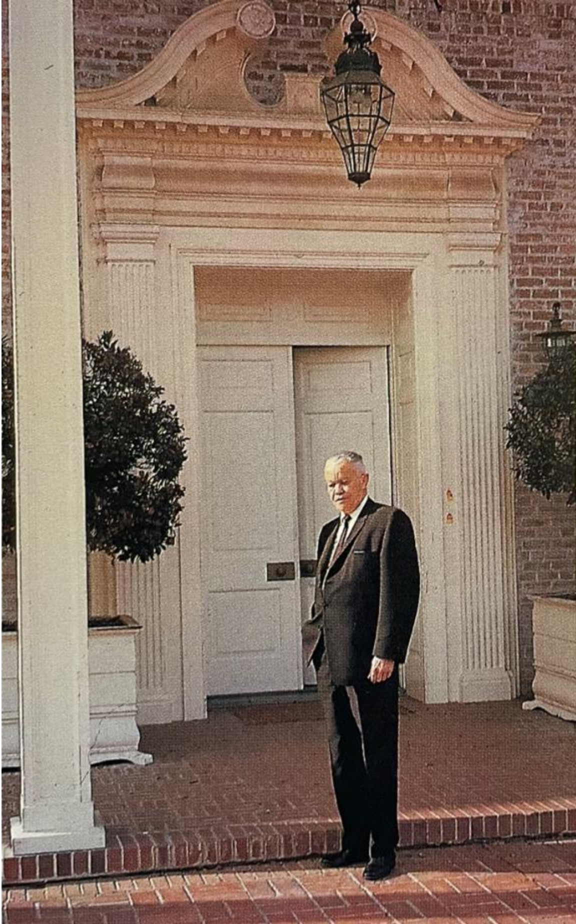

Figure 15. Unknown photographer, *Paul R. Williams in front of E. L. Cord Residence*, before 1963. Hudson, Karen E. *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*. New York: Rizzoli, 1993, 58.

Figure 16. Cameron Carothers, *Dr. Robert Norman Williams Residence*, Ontario, CA, n.d.

Figure 17. Magui, *Old Post Office, Ontario, CA*, c. 1926.

Introduction

Tarrying with *Cites*/*Sights*/*Sites* of Trouble

tarry = to stay longer than intended; delay leaving

If you've visited Los Angeles or know it's cityscape through photographs or film, you have likely encountered a Paul Revere Williams building. Williams designed more than 3,000 projects during a career spanning about sixty years. His work in shaping the city's public and private spaces is profound, extending throughout Southern California with touch points across the United States, and including Mexico and Colombia. While the volume of his work is remarkable in its own regard, that Williams was one of the first Black architects in the U.S. to flourish is impressive. When the significant influence he garnered for both his small affordable designs for new homeowners and revivalist residential architecture for the wealthy is considered along with his service on national, state, and city housing commissions, as well as the distinctions of becoming the first Black member of the American Institute of Architects, its first Black Fellow, and an AIA Gold Medalist, Williams's work stands out as even more remarkable.

A black-and-white photograph of Williams taken in front of a winter home built in Ojai in 1927[1] for investment banker James Riley made in the popular Spanish Colonial Revival style documents the young architect not long after establishing his own firm in 1922 (Fig. 1). As an occupation photograph, the image participates in a tradition established early in photography's history of subjects sitting for staged images, typically in a studio setting, arranged with signifiers

[1] Jocelyn Gibbs, "Class California Hacienda Courtyard," *architectureforsale.com*, https://architectureforsale.com/afsquarterly/classic-california-courtyard-hacienda/.

of the subject's profession such as characteristic clothing, tools, and products. As always, Williams is impeccably dressed and his mannerisms are suave and refined, characteristics that many who knew him have described.[2] He looks to the camera with a somewhat serious expression, although there is a hesitancy in his pose that is difficult to describe, possibly suggested by the uncharacteristic placement of his right hand on his hip and left hand on an entryway barrier. While he looks full of youthful determination moving with confidence through the space even while exhibiting a bit of caution, Williams's composure signals an awareness of systems bent on refuting his ability to be in this very space and engage in the work that he resolutely trained to do. In the photo, as in his writings and professional life, Williams meets those aggressions with grace and decorum.

Williams began to pose for occupational portraits early in his career and continued the practice until he retired in 1973. At an immediate level, the photographs often record the architect in front buildings he designed to serve as a visual record of his creative production. However, this dissertation will argue that the photographs do much more than provide an objective record of Williams's creative production.

Paul R. Williams at Work in Photographs: Tarrying with Cites/Sights/Sites of Trouble will locate analysis of Williams's work in occupation portraits like the Ojai photograph rather than the buildings that Williams built to knead the intersections of photo history, architectural history, cultural studies, and cultural geography to argue that Williams's work continues in these images.

---

[2] Evan Nicole Brown, "Why Paul Williams, Hollywood's most prolific black architect, drew upside down," *Fast Company* website, February 21, 2020, https://www.fastcompany.com/90465687/why-paul-williams-hollywoods-most-prolific-black-architect-drew-upside-down.

While cultural studies and cultural geography have long examined notions of power as manifested, organized, reproduced, and contested in the visual realm, art history, the history of photography, and architectural history have been apathetic in taking up theoretical frames examining racial epistemologies and the affective consequences of colonial and imperial power. As such, Williams's occupation photographs used alongside his writings offer a spectacular opportunity to engage in the important work of expanding visual history's tools and analytics.

Central to this dissertation is the idea that it is necessary to tarry with Williams's performance of a professional persona as well as the spaces he crafted, both theoretical and physical, in part because Williams took a conservative approach to social justice work. To tarry implies staying longer than invited or deemed permissible, and my use of the word gestures towards a tension that might be gleaned in the circumstance of being an Anglo-Chicana, white presenting scholar who joins both scholarly and popular efforts of generations of people of color to argue emphatically that Williams's work is worthy of sustained critical inquiry and attention. In this tarry with Williams's photographs, I acknowledge with Kristina Wilson whose exceptional *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design* (2021) this dissertation will draw upon, that "I have been challenged to be mindful of my own White biases" and have made a commitment to "not[ing] Whiteness as a marked position – even when articulated unconsciously"[3] as well as to seek out points of view that may not fit within academic canons.

[3] Kristina Wilson, "Introduction" in *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021), 15.

Trouble, Ruptures, and Counter Histories

To "trouble" is to contest, dispute, fight against, struggle with, oppose, and challenge. The photographic realm holds a furtive relationship with trouble. Photographs can be trouble. Indeed, as much as photographs are capable of recording injustice they are just as often troubling and troublesome. This dissertation begins with the premise that the photograph can be a place where trouble is imagined and even cooked up.

Susan Sontag elucidates that the act of producing a photographic image is culturally qualified through the language of hunting – one goes on a photographic *shoot*, a photographer *captures* a subject and *takes* an image, the shutter is *triggered*, and photos produced without the subject's consent are regularly held to be *triumphs* of art. Given that the practice of photography is socially constructed as an act of predation, it is not surprising that photos quite often memorialize injustice and cruelty. As Sontag famously related about images of the Bergen-Belsen and Dachau concentration camps that she came across in a Santa Monica bookstore as a child, viewing images of atrocities can operate on the viewer in damaging and debilitating ways:

> Nothing I have seen — in photographs or in real life — ever cut me as sharply, deeply, instantaneously. Indeed, it seems plausible to me to divide my life into two parts, before I saw those photographs (I was twelve) and after, though it was several years before I understood fully what they were about . . .. When I looked at those photographs, something broke. Some limit had been reached, and not only that of horror; I felt irrevocably grieved, wounded, but a part of my feelings started to tighten; something went dead; something is still crying.[4]

[4] Susan Sontag, "In Plato's Cave," in *On Photography* (New York: Anchor Doubleday, 1989), 20.

Hannah Arendt similarly writes of a breaking point when she begins "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man" (1951) by reflecting:

> It is impossible even now to describe what actually happened in Europe on August 4, 1914. The days before and the days after the first World War are separated not like the end of an old and the beginning of a new period, but like the day before and the day after an explosion. Yet this figure of speech is as inaccurate as are all others, because the quiet of sorrow which settles down after a catastrophe has never come to pass. The first explosion seems to have touched off a chain reaction in which we have been caught ever since and which nobody seems to be able to stop.[5]

Both Sontag and Arendt articulate a sense of rupture resulting in a state of disorientation that is inextricably linked with modernity. The rupture is not necessarily related to the violence that is culturally associated with viewing photographs, but "rupture" nonetheless suggests a violent break that Sontag and Arendt articulate with visual language. I posit that there is something to this association – that the predation and violence that is culturally associated with photography somehow corresponds (even if just by analogy) to the breaks and ruptures associated with the modern world, which not coincidentally is the point in time that a method for producing a fixed image using light, light sensitive media, and an optical device (a.k.a. photography) is developed and practiced in plurality.[6] Where Arendt seems to be thinking about difficult memories that

[5] Hannah Arendt, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man," in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) (Orlando: Harvest Book, 1968), 267.

[6] This is a point that Roland Barthes makes when he writes, "the same century invented History and Photography" in Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 93.

have been held in suspension like a photographic image, Sontag is emphatic about her experience looking at photographs depicting difficult history. In their descriptions, each author demonstrates the influence of Walter Benjamin's historical materialist sense of history as irruptive. Benjamin writes in "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940):

> The true picture of the past flits by. The past can be seized only as an image which flashes up at the instant when it can be recognized and is never seen again . . .. For every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably.[7]

Continuing the analogy that relates the act of taking a photograph with the human experience of time, Benjamin asserts that

> thinking involves not only the flow of thoughts, but their arrest as well. Where thinking suddenly stops in a configuration pregnant with tensions, it gives that configuration a shock, by which it crystalizes into a monad. A historical materialist . . . takes cognizance of it in order to blast a specific era out of the homogeneous course of history–blasting a specific life out of the era or a specific work out of the lifework.[8]

For Benjamin, the act of thinking, reasoning, and engaging in criticism make a similar kind of capture to the photograph possible, allowing the theorist to cease upon an idea and form something new – the monad, an atom, or a kernel that holds infinite possibility. Anticipating

---

[7] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), 198.

[8] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), 207.

Foucauldian genealogy[9] Benjamin imagines the historian "blasting" fragments of time/events out of the strict timeline of history to activate its relevance in the present. Given these conditions, the work of the visual theorist and photographic historian involves identifying and examining leaks and fractures.

Also writing about loss in the modern world, in this instance, the loss of tradition (what to Benjamin conferred meaning on the image), Arendt writes:

> With the loss of tradition we have lost the thread which safely guided us through the vast realms of the past, but this thread was also the chain fettering each successive generation to a predetermined aspect of the past. It could be that only now will the past open up to us with unexpected freshness and tell us things no one has yet had ears to hear.[10]

For Arendt, the historian, the citizen, the subject is untethered by the ruptures and blasts. Having newfound mobility, the modern subject can recognize messages that were occluded and rendered unseeable in the past. In these flashes, fissures, and breaks, a model of history predicated on a contiguous line, ever reaching towards progress is shattered, and the historian/citizen subject is called upon to sift through the fragments and identify the pieces that might help make sense of the present rather than sponsor truths or singular ways of knowing.

---

[9] Michel Foucault, *The Archaeology of Knowledge: And the Discourse on Language* (1969) trans. A. M. Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1982).

[10] Hannah Arendt, *Between Past and Future: Eight Exercises in Political Thought* (1954) (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 94.

As this dissertation will examine, Williams is often identified as "the architect to the stars" to the dismay of many who knew him to be deeply invested in improving the lives of average Black Americans. Indeed, popular media's repetitive focus on the mansions Williams built for white Hollywood celebrities becomes suspicious because of its insistent overshadowing of the architect's civic and social work. In response, this dissertation will look at Williams's occupation photographs slowly and over time to advocate that viewers sit with the photos in order to see how they inform and interact with other media, contexts, and knowledge banks. By tarrying with Williams's occupation photographs, this dissertation specifically aims to illuminate and define the political trouble of Williams's work – the ways in which Williams questions, problematizes, and discounts relationships of power and dominance – within a Critical Race Theory approach that conjures and welcomes counter-histories and alternative narratives.

The work of photo historian and cultural theorist Ariella Aïesha Azoulay also cultivates counter-histories. In *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008), Azoulay calls for a new manual for understanding advertising photographs[11] claiming that "the wrong users' manual hinders the spectator's understanding."[12] For Azoulay, the problem resides in the longstanding "reduc[tion of] photography to the photograph [itself] and to the gaze concentrated on it in an attempt to identify the subject."[13] Through this process, the photographer is made an omnipotent conqueror while the subject is reduced simply to a sign to deconstruct and an abstract body to pose.

[11] Though her concern begins with this criticism of advertising photographs, Azoulay quickly turns to an examination of documentary and photojournalistic photographs, where her critique remains fixed. For the purpose of this dissertation's examination, I will drop the specific category of "advertising photographs" to apply Azoulay's claims to photographs that were involved in advertising and promotion, but also appear in artistic, scholarly, and memorializing work. The suggestion here intentionally breaks with modernist categories to open new fields of critical inquiry.

[12] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 14.

[13] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 14.

Azoulay calls for a new appraisal – for photographs to be understood as a space in which the photographer is not the sole, indeed not even the most important, creator of meaning. Cajoling viewers to finally move past the photographer's exalted point of view, Azoulay argues that the photographic subject participates in a meaningful way to the messages that an image might transmit, frequently offering an alternative narrative to dominant discourse.

Applying the concept of citizenship to articulate the transmission of counter-histories by photographic subjects, Azoulay acutely reasons that

> citizenship is not merely a status, a good, or a piece of private property possessed by the citizen, but rather a tool of a struggle or an obligation to others to struggle against injuries inflicted on those others, citizen and noncitizen alike – others who are governed along with the spectator.[14]

Through this reading of the condition of citizenship, Azoulay asserts that "one needs to stop looking at the photograph and instead start watching it," as in the way the experience of film is described[15] to be able to move beyond the primacy given to the photographer's point of view. In other words, Azoulay finds that when a viewer tarries with images, neglected and erased stories are made available because the viewer enters a rhetorical space operating within the field of the photographic image that holds the possibility of transformative debate, redemption, and affirmation. When the spectator is prompted to understand the photographic image as activating a tool of struggle that operates pluralistically, new understandings of the subjects, rendering, and operation of the photograph are allowed to unfold.

[14] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 14.
[15] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 14.

Similarly minded, art historian W. J. T. Mitchell's *Landscape and Power* asks scholars to "think of landscape," whether photographed or painted, "not as an object to be seen or a text to be read, but as a process by which social and subjective identities are formed."[16] As with Azoulay, Mitchell develops a theoretical concept across several texts and formations (i.e. landscape, pictures, power, and race) demurely qualifying his approach as not so much a methodology in *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images* (2005),[17] then linking its framework in his 2010 W. E. B. Du Bois Lectures at Harvard University (2012) to Fredric Jameson's distinction of theory as "a form of general reflection that, in contrast to most branches of philosophy, is critically aware of its own mediation by language."[18] Mitchell expands upon Jameson's discernment to declare that nonverbal media: the visual arts, cinema and performance are "not merely subjects for theoretical reflection, but [are] themselves . . . forms of nondiscursive theorizing."[19] Eventually identifying his approach as "medium theory,"[20] Mitchell aims to "make the *relationality* of image and beholder the field of investigation" in order that "pictures [might be made] less scrutable, less transparent" as well as "to turn analysis of pictures toward questions of process, affect, and [like Azoulay,] to put in question the spectator position."[21]

While Azoulay and Mitchell each express a pressing need for new methods of understanding photographic images that move away from and even operate outside of and against well-worn

---

[16] W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (1994) (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1.

[17] Indeed, Mitchell emphatically states that "no method is being offered here" in Mitchell, W. J. T., *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images* (The University of Chicago Press: 2005), 48.

[18] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race* (Harvard University Press: 2012), 12 and 184n7.

[19] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race* (Harvard University Press: 2012), 12.

[20] W. J. T. Mitchell, *Seeing Through Race* (Harvard University Press: 2012), 12.

[21] W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images* (The University of Chicago Press: 2005), 49.

deconstructionist modes of interpretation, Azoulay particularly denounces postmodern theorists for "proclaim[ing] that viewers' eyes ha[ve] grown unseeing," arguing instead that it is theorists who have "simply stopped looking."[22] For Azoulay, postmodern theorists have relied far too much on the position of the photographer in recognizing, framing, and processing any given image. She argues that this "prevailing but erroneous conceptualization of photography" as "freezing this instant or sealing it in death" prevents the spectator from perceiving "a certain instant framed by the photographer who observes it and witnesses it from the outside."[23] Azoulay urges readers, in their tarry with photography to consider photographic experience in the round and over time rather than from a static singular point of view, pointedly rejecting French semiotician, Roland Barthes's famous coupling of the photographic image with death – that the "photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death,"[24] and "in every photograph: the return of the dead."[25] Rather, Azoulay counters that "the event of photography is [instead] subject to a unique form of temporality–it is made up of an infinite series of encounters,"[26] and as such

> is never over. It can only be suspended, caught in the anticipation of the next encounter that will allow for its actualization: an encounter that might allow a certain spectator to remark on the excess or lack inscribed in the photograph so as to re-articulate every detail including those that some believe to be fixed in place by the glossy emulsion of the photograph.[27]

---

[22] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 11.

[23] Ariella Azoulay, trans. Louise Bethlehem, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2012), 25.

[24] Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard, *Camera Lucida* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 97.

[25] Roland Barthes, trans. Richard Howard, *Camera Lucida* (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 9.

[26] Ariella Azoulay, trans. Louise Bethlehem, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2012), 26.

[27] Ariella Azoulay, trans. Louise Bethlehem, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2012), 25.

Mitchell also argues with slightly differing nuance that it is necessary "to grasp *both* sides of the paradox of the image: that it is alive-but also dead; powerful-but also weak; meaningful-but also meaningless."[28]

Where Mitchell is willing to sit with and continue to incorporate deconstructionist modes, Azoulay further agitates spectators to discern the relationality between the subject, photographer, and viewer of the resulting image arguing that

> there is something that extends beyond the photographer's action . . .. Every photograph of others bears the trace of the meeting between the photographed persons and the photographer, neither of whom can, on their own, determine how this meeting will be inscribed in the resulting image.[29]

Activated by such traces – potentially in grand fashion when mass reproduction is exponentially scaled through social media – Azoulay argues that a political space unfolds between the photographic subject and viewer that is capable of defying hierarchies of power. This occurs "even when these traces express cultural and social hierarchies that organize power relations between photographer, camera, and photographed person," because such traces "never simply echo such relations nor do they necessarily reflect the point of view of the most powerful figure present in the arena at the time the photograph was captured."[30] Azoulay describes this "civil political space" as an interval that is employed by "people using photography," whom Azoulay

---

[28] W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images* (The University of Chicago Press: 2005), 10.

[29] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 11.

[30] Ariella Azoulay, trans. Louise Bethlehem, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2012), 24-25.

insists includes “photographers, spectators, and photographed people” [31] alike. In this political space, mediation is inconstant and flexible, capable of dynamic shifts across space, time, viewer and viewing context.

Meanwhile, Mitchell frequently engages in a critique of art historical approaches, though insistently defending the field. He commends art historical discourses for accomplishing necessary understandings of images even while urging for additional systems of inquiry that might nurture new possibilities for understanding images and the means through which they influence human viewers. In *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* Mitchell affirms that

> vision is as important as language in mediating social relations, and it is not reducible to language, to the ‘sign,’ or to discourse. Pictures want equal rights with language, not to be turned into language. They want neither to be leveled into a ‘history of images’ nor elevated into a ‘history of art,’ but to be seen as complex individuals occupying multiple subject positions and identities.[32]

In a note on this point, Mitchell acknowledges an important connection to Julia Kristeva: “Another way to put this would be to say that pictures do not want to be reduced to the terms of a systemic linguistics based in a unitary Cartesian subject, but they might be open to the ‘poetics of enunciation’ that Julia Kristeva so cogently transferred from literature to the visual arts in her classic text, *Desire in Language*” (1980).[33] Mitchell also forges a connection to Benjamin’s

[31] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 12.

[32] W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images* (The University of Chicago Press: 2005), 47.

[33] W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images* (The University of Chicago Press: 2005), 48, n.35.

famous theory on the loss of the aura through the capability of endless reproduction in the mechanical age, arguing that "Walter Benjamin thought that history and tradition were exactly what conferred 'aura'–literally, 'breath'–on the work of art."[34]

Azoulay approaches the argument via another route in *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (2012), describing photography's capacity to craft a civil political space that "differentiates the photograph from all other forms of documentation that we know, and renders it a powerful and suggestive source for understanding the *political* existence of human beings"[35] (my emphasis). In this space, the photographic subject appeals to the spectator, understanding that the photograph provides a rhetorical platform (think soap box, symposia, and even stump speech) that can operate outside of the confines of national doctrine, capitalist profit, regimes of terror, and slippery systems of oppression. In other words, photography's ontological condition offers a space where grievances can be voiced and heard. In response to the appeal, the viewer of photography is prompted and made responsible to act. The civil space of photography thus involves time and is enduring because a significant amount of time may unfold in between the photographic subject's point of address and the viewer's reception of that message. Additionally, a viewer may misunderstand or shirk their duty to act. However, because the civil space of photography operates across generations, the possibility of action is often expanded relative to the physical space of what Arendt terms "the *polis*." In this paradigm, a viewer may be prompted to act against injustice that was photographed a century prior, from a different place/social context than the subject made the appeal. As a result, the viewer may have strategies and courses

[34] W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images* (The University of Chicago Press: 2005), 52.

[35] Ariella Azoulay, trans. Louise Bethlehem, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2012), 25.

of action that were inaccessible to the photographic subject at the time and place in which the photograph was made.

Azoulay's theorizing is indebted to Hannah Arendt's concern for the citizen subject's "right to have rights"[36] and takes up many of Arendt's claims concerning the *vita activa* in application to the experience of viewing photographs. Writing in *The Human Condition* (1958) Arendt asserts,

> action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly."[37]

Azoulay picks up this articulation of the human condition to argue that the photographic subject thus "[becomes] a citizen in the citizenry of photography," a state that allows them to address the spectator in future tense.[38] Utilizing Arendt's concepts of plurality and the space of appearance Azoulay offers a tantalizing idea – that power flows through and is utilized by the photographic subject in ways that have yet to be seriously considered:

> The civil contract of photography assumes that, at least in principle, the users of photography, possess a certain power to suspend the gesture of the sovereign power

[36] Hannah Arendt, "The Decline of the Nation-State and the End of the Rights of Man," in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) (Orlando: Harvest Book, 1968), 267-302.
[37] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (1958) (The University of Chicago Press, 1989), 198-199.
[38] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 143.

> which seeks to totally dominate the relations between them as governed—governed into citizens and noncitizens, thus making disappear the violation of citizenship.[39]

Thus, anyone may become a citizen of photography. Equally, anyone may make an appeal within the space of appearance activated in the civil space of photography. What's more, all subjects have a right to rights in this space.

Although "every citizen in the citizenry of photography has equal rights," Azoulay concedes, "photography continues to testify to the enormous inequality that reigns outside"[40] and thus she urges that the citizenry of photography work to "rethink the political space of governed populations and to reformulate the boundaries of citizenship as distinct from the nation and the market whose dual rationale constantly threatens to subjugate it."[41] Through visual analysis of images focusing on the Palestinian conflict with Israel, Azoulay "analyzes the limitations of citizenship but also tries to invite . . . readers to imagine other possibilities that were embodied in the invention of modern citizenship."[42] She argues perceptively:

> After all, to invent modern citizenship in the 18th century required a lot of imagination. There is no reason to assume that the work of the imagination must remain the possession of past thinkers and that we are condemned to live within the limits that their imagination drafted.[43]

---

[39] Ariella Azoulay, "Ariella Azoulay on her book *The Civil Contract of Photography*," *Rorotoko* (website), January 22, 2009, http://rorotoko.com/interview/20090123_azoulay_ariella_book_civil_contract_photography/.

[40] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 144.

[41] Ariella Azoulay, "Ariella Azoulay on her book *The Civil Contract of Photography*," *Rorotoko*(website), January 22, 2009, http://rorotoko.com/interview/20090123_azoulay_ariella_book_civil_contract_photography/.

[42] Ariella Azoulay, "Ariella Azoulay on her book *The Civil Contract of Photography*," *Rorotoko* (website), January 22, 2009, http://rorotoko.com/interview/20090123_azoulay_ariella_book_civil_contract_photography/.

[43] Ariella Azoulay, "Ariella Azoulay on her book *The Civil Contract of Photography*," *Rorotoko*, January 22, 2009, http://rorotoko.com/interview/20090123_azoulay_ariella_book_civil_contract_photography/.

In this way, Azoulay formulates a condition in which the subaltern can speak,[44] in which the non-citizen is a member, and in which the oppressed can act against the tyrannies of both governments and societies through participation in the construction of meaning within the photographic image. But the formula demands a second actor – the viewer, who is charged with the task of responding to the appeal through action.

Analytic Approach for Watching and Hearing Political Trouble in Photographs

Complex parallels exist between Mitchell and Azoulay's theoretical work that to my knowledge have not been extensively examined.[45] Indeed, it is surprising to read each author's work and not find regular citations of the other.[46] The topic of this dissertation begins at the point where Azoulay's consideration of the civil contract of photography and Mitchell's medium theory converge. Concerned with the ubiquity of the photographic image and the surfeit of interactions with images that humans in the 21st century must navigate, this dissertation joins Azoulay and

---

[44] This is a reference to Gayayatri Chakravorty Spivak's influential proposal that individuals who labor on the periphery of a globalized world have no access to the state and are thus obstructed by capitalist ideologies from political subjectivity. Gayayatri Chakravorty Spivak, *Can the Subaltern Speak? : Reflections on the History of an Idea*, in Rosalind C. Morris, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2010) https://search-ebscohost-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=584675&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[45] Mark Reinhardt considers the relationship between contemporary photography and the political field in "Theorizing the Event of Photography – The Visual Politics of Violence and Terror in Azoulay's *Civil Imagination*, Linfield's *The Cruel Radiance* and Mitchell's *Cloning Terror*" *Theory and Event*, 2013, https://www.academia.edu/5419893/Theorizing_the_Event_of_Photography_The_Visual_Politics_of_Violence_and_Terror_in_Azoulay_s_Civil_Imagination_Linfield_s_The_Cruel_Radiance_and_Mitchell_s_Cloning_Terror.

[46] Azoulay cites W. J. T. Mitchell's "Holy Landscape: Israel, Palestine, and the American Wilderness," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 26, no. 2, Winter 2000: 193-223 in *The Civil Contract of Photography*, as well as *Seeing Through Race* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012) and "The Photographic Essay: Four Case Studies," in *Picture Theory: Essays on Verbal and Visual Representation* (University of Chicago Press, 1994) in *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019). However, Mitchell does not typically include a Bibliography in his works, which makes finding information on his sources demanding. Nonetheless, to my knowledge, Mitchell does not cite Azoulay as a source, and Azoulay does not utilize Mitchell's work extensively.

Mitchell in crafting a new method of understanding the political existence of humans conveyed through photographs with the intention of making the path of inquiry more accessible.

Reading Azoulay alongside Mitchell – while supported by Walter Benjamin, Hannah Arendt, and Roland Barthes, sometimes in chorus – in relation to trouble thus opens a fecund problem: if photographs provide a space outside of time and beyond the restrictions of regimes of power in which subjects may affirm their citizenship, and thereby find ground to appear, communicate, and act politically, what kinds of counter-histories are photographs capable of conveying and imagining when the event depicted is not overtly violent or the subjects represented are not obviously dealing with enduring and systemic assaults? Interested in Arendt's understanding of *praxis*, this dissertation asks what procedure might be applied to make the political existence of humans visible within the photograph? In other words, how exactly might the viewer "watch" a photograph or "hear" the photographic subject's appeal to discern political trouble? If photographic images can be understood as the fragments of history, is it then reasonable to assert that photographs might also be capable of reenacting social aspiration, affirm enduring struggle, and prompt shared healing? In other words, can photographic images also be understood as vital to the formation and practice of the citizenship? For that matter, might photographs operate as plants that formulate what freedom might look like?

Additionally, this dissertation is curious about the field of political engagement articulated in the photograph. Where a great deal has been written about photographs depicting the sites of war and atrocity, what can be said of the spaces in which political agitation occurs and is imagined within the photograph? Political trouble is often layered in entanglements. This dissertation seeks

to articulate some of the rhetorical reverberations visualized specifically in Paul R. Williams's occupational photographs.

While Azoulay's work focuses on the Palestinian conflict with Israel, her work provides crucial apparatus for understanding Williams's occupation photographs in a new way. Most importantly, Azoulay asserts that the photograph is a civil space in which the unseen can appear, a point that is vital to this dissertation's premise. As such, it is necessary to address Afropessimism as a lens for discerning Blackness with a sincere note that this consideration deserves a much lengthier tarry than can be offered in this dissertation, and a promise to take up the conversation more fully in future writing. African American and Cultural Studies theorist, Frank B. Wilderson III, who is credited with coining the term, describes Afropessimism as a "theory of the *non*sense"[47] that is "premised on an iconoclastic claim: that Blackness is coterminous with Slaveness. Blackness is social death, which is to say that there was never a prior moment of plentitude, never a moment of equilibrium, never a moment of social life."[48] Wilderson writes that the critical lens argues that "*Blacks are not Human subjects, but are instead structurally inert props, implements for the execution of White and non-Black fantasies and sadomasochistic pleasures*"[49] (emphasis original). Further, Wilderson writes that Afropessimism therefore importantly stresses that,

> Blacks do not function as political subjects; instead, our flesh and energies are instrumentalized for postcolonial, immigrant, feminist, LGBTQ, transgender, and workers' agendas predicated on Black ethical dilemmas. A Black radical agenda is terrifying to most people on the Left-think Bernie Sanders-because it emanates

[47] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 224.
[48] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 225-226.
[49] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 15.

> from a condition of suffering for which there is no imaginable strategy for redress-no narrative of social, political, or national redemption.[50]

Although Azoulay does not contend with Afropessimism directly, relative to the appeal that a photographic subject makes via the image, she asserts that

> no special talent is required in order to listen to an injury claim. The traces of the injury are imprinted on the surface of the photographic image, awaiting a spectator to assist them. An addresser initiated the restoration of the conditions of visibility through the reconstruction of the four elements *énonceé*: addresser, addressee, referent, and meaning. The spectator is called to take part in this restoration. She is not expected to complete the job. The photograph she faces testifies that an addressee has already taken part in the restoration of civil conditions.[51]

Azoulay further argues in *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (2019)

> when we depart from the photographer's studio and look at photography as an imperial technology of extraction, globally operative since the mid-nineteenth century, th[e] universality of the 'anyone' collapses and the racial labor division and accumulation of visual wealth for profit become undeniable.

In claiming that Blacks are not Human subjects, Afropessimism asserts "the claims of universal humanity . . . are hobbled by a meta-aporia: a contradiction that manifests whenever one looks

---

[50] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 15.
[51] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 143-144.

seriously at the structure of Black suffering in comparison to the presumed universal structure of all sentient beings."[52] Wilderson positions the Afropessimist lens as "pessimistic" towards "the claims theories of liberation make when these theories try to explain Black suffering or when they analogize Black suffering with the suffering of other oppressed beings."[53] However, Azoulay affirms that when the photograph is reimagined through a structure that intends to unlearn imperialism, "which involves different types of 'de-,' such as decompressing and decoding: 're-,' such as reversing and rewinding; and 'un-,' such as unlearning and undoing"[54] it is possible to avoid the traps of universalizing rhetoric and analogies that refuse to distinguish Black suffering from all forms of human suffering.

Thus, understanding the ontology of photography to be "fundamentally, political"[55] and agreeing with Azoulay that "the specific domain of photography" is "the privileged site for the generation of a civil discourse,"[56] this dissertation moves to formulate an analytic approach for looking at photographs that might illuminate political trouble in operation, using Williams's occupation portraits as a case study.

Although Williams did not directly account for a practice of self-styling and performing the work of a Black white-collar professional in photographs, his occupation portraits nonetheless offer rich narratives of the architect's adept negotiation of racial boundaries. In this way, this dissertation defines "trouble" as a photographic act that contests, disputes, challenges, and fights

---

[52] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 15.

[53] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 14.

[54] Ariella Aïesha Azoulay, *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism* (London: Verso, 2019), 10.

[55] Ariella Azoulay, trans. Louise Bethlehem, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2012), 14.

[56] Ariella Azoulay, trans. Louise Bethlehem, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography* (London: Verso, 2012), 10.

against forms of political power and will argue that by instigating and participating in trouble in his occupation photographs, Williams activates a public and political space of appearance that nurtures vital discourses on race and citizenship. Because the photos are circulated in the public realm by Williams's communities of remembrance – those who remember his work and agree to take up his appeals in the present – the trouble that his occupation photographs stir continues to percolate. This energy is then harnessed to build upon myth-making that the architect initiated in his own writings and speeches, among other important activities. Through the myths and narratives that are cultivated, Williams's legacy is also energized, and his work bridges past, present, and future conditions and imaginaries in beautiful ways that move well beyond the physical structures he created.

In the chapters that follow, I will develop an analytic approach that aims to illuminate the political work of Williams as a photographic subject, and the trouble that he thus engages with a play on words that focuses viewership on three key concepts*: cites*, *sights*, and *sites – sights cubed*. As vital anchor points for the examination that proceeds, it is necessary to further define several key terms.

First, this dissertation theorizes a *cite* of trouble as an idea concerning the contest or disruption of power that operates within photographic images. A *cite* works like a footnote citation in that it conveys conduits of power and interrupts the reading experience in the way that Benjamin and Arendt articulate the irruptions of history and their influence on the present. When a photographic subject poses in a way that refers to a well-known photographic image, or that conjures a scene that is culturally understood in political terms, a *cite* of trouble is being made.

Secondly, the *sights cubed* approach defines a *sight* of trouble as the point in which struggle is recognized, acknowledged, and observed by the viewer of photographs. It is the construct of meaning that conveys the terms of struggle to the viewer of an image. In other words, this dissertation understands a *sight* of trouble to be an image of power under challenge that may or may not yet have been translated into a photograph. In this way, a *sight* of trouble can also be understood as the performance and visualization of a political argument or appeal.

In Benjamin's phrasing, the moment of recognition is "a configuration pregnant with tensions."[57] As such, the sight of trouble differs from the gaze – Laura Mulvey's concept[58] which relates to the sociologic effects prompted by the way filmic audiences (who in her analysis are presumed to be white, male, and heterosexual by Hollywood filmmakers) look at female presenting subjects, and how female audiences look at female presenting filmic subjects, and then themselves. Mulvey posits that the presumed male audience exhibits power over the female subject who is objectified and stripped of agency by the imbalance of power that is standardized in classic Hollywood narratives.

Instead, I propose that something happens when viewers see injustice and atrocity in photographic images, which Azoulay articulates as the photographic subject's appeal being "heard" by the photographic viewer. The photographic subject creates what this dissertation defines as "sight lines," which I liken to a conduit that conveys the appeal. Once the appeal is recognized, the circuit is connected, and the viewer must decide whether to act. I propose that

[57] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), 207.

[58] Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema," *Screen* Volume 16, Issue 3 Autumn 1975, https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.

photographs of events such as the 1965 march on the Edmund Pettus[59] Bridge in Selma, Alabama where civil rights activist John Lewis led a peaceful demonstration against legalized racial segregation and was violently attacked by state troopers, along with cell phone images and footage of George Floyd Jr. being killed by police officer Derek Chauvin in Minneapolis, Minnesota (at a *site* now known as "George Floyd Square") are cogent examples of the *sight* of trouble. In photographic, filmic, and video images of these events, the photographic subjects clearly make appeals to future viewers to act against injustice. But this dissertation takes the position that the sight of injustice itself is a prompt for viewers to act, regardless of the presence of an obvious subject who extends a direct appeal to viewers of the image.

Third, the *sights cubed* approach distinguishes the *site* of trouble, as both the operation of a site in cultivating or blocking political trouble, as well as the physical space that is shaped through the photographic event such that the terrain then functions as a representation of a political cause or contestation of power. *Sites* of trouble are conceived and activated by viewers who discern the space (physical, abstract, or imagined) as a place of struggle through the photographic event. I am thinking here of the experience one might have while touring a site such as the Kamloops Indian Residential School in Canada on which the remains of indigenous children as young as three years old who suffered physical, sexual, and emotional abuse were recently discovered.[60] The space was recently turned into a museum after closing in the 1970s, and as such, will become a site that is photographed and visualized in relation to the atrocities that occurred there. Similarly, the Hampton Normal and Agricultural Institute in Virginia (now Hampton University)

[59] Edmund Pettus was a Confederate officer who was active in the Ku Klux Klan after the Civil War while serving as Senator of Alabama from 1897 to 1907.

[60] Ian Austen, "'Horrible History': Mass Grave of Indigenous Children Reported in Canada," *New York Times*, May 28, 2021, https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/28/world/canada/kamloops-mass-grave-residential-schools.html.

which was established in 1868 to educate newly freed Black Americans and was famously photographed by Frances Benjamin Johnston between 1899 and 1900. In both examples, the physical site is transformed into a political space aiming towards reconciliation and healing through photographic interaction with the *site* by viewers. I argue that under the forces of collective viewing, and the telling of counter-histories and narratives of dissent that are cultivated in such spaces by photography, physical *sites* of trouble can be transformed through the mediating circumstances of being photographed to a space of appearance where the injured may claim a voice and be heard. When a *site* of struggle is photographed, the space itself becomes a consequential subject and as such, these places do much more than memorialize – as recent political battles concerning Confederate monuments testify – they also motivate and support an ethic of citizenship that stridently insists on the possibility of justice, equity, and restitution.

Methodologies

This dissertation will be experimental in utilizing critical theory in photo history, philosophy, and cultural studies to analyze twelve occupation photographs of architect, Paul R. Williams. The *sights cubed* formula will be used to train the viewer's eye and understanding towards seeing and hearing the political existence of Williams as performed in photographs. In this framing, the goal is to illuminate the political layers of meaning in the photographs to engage pointedly with counter-histories, dismissed narratives, and unheard stories.

Barthes's influence is pervasive. Where Azoulay appears eager to abandon the deconstructionist model, the dissertation finds credibility in elements of Barthes's approach while also arguing against a key value he ascribes to the photograph. After all, Barthes did advise against the tyranny of "center[ing] the author, his person, his life, his tastes, his passions"[61] because he understood writing to involve "the destruction of every voice."[62] Out of this rejection of myth, Barthes advocates on behalf of the viewer's agency in conjuring and determining visual meaning urging that "to give writing its future, it is necessary to overthrow they myth [of the power of the author to convey all meaning]: [thus,] the birth of the reader must be at the cost of the death of the Author[!]"[63] Nonetheless, this dissertation seeks a way out of binary oppositions and will center anti-imperialist, anti-capitalist, and anti-racist frameworks in order to elevate counter-histories, dismissed narratives, and obstructed perspectives.

Arendt argues that "men are free – as distinguished from their possessing the gift for freedom – as long as they act, neither before nor after; for to be free and to act are the same."[64] For Arendt, freedom is expressed through the phenomenon of virtuosity and the decisions that one makes through their own free will. This dissertation will argue that Williams fashioned a space of appearance in his occupation photographs where he engaged in debate and criticism concerning his own subjectivity and citizenship – a political trouble that was neither encouraged nor supported by laws, rights, nor social constructs. For Williams, home ownership was the marker

[61] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 143.
[62] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 142.
[63] Roland Barthes, "The Death of the Author," in *Image, Music, Text*, trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, 1978), 148.
[64] Hannah Arendt, "What is Freedom" in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, ed. Peter Baehr (New York: The Viking Press, 1961), 445-446.

of citizenship, and the fact that he was prevented by racial covenants and redlining from building a home of his own until 1952, when he was 58 years old, having already raised his family and established himself as a well-known architect, operated forcefully in his conception of freedom and what it means to be an American. The *sights cubed* formula will thus be employed to analyze occupation photographs of Paul R. Williams to tarry with American understandings of the citizen, freedom, and progress.

In the chapters that follow, analysis will consider the work that Williams makes visible in photographs alongside written essays and speeches to demonstrate Williams's participation in the civil space of photography. To my knowledge, no scholar has yet drawn parallels to Williams's practice of sitting for occupation photographs to Frederick Douglass's life-long practice of sitting for photographic self-portraits that he then shared widely. I will argue that Williams, modeling the abolitionist statesman's practice of sitting for photographs, activates a space of appearance to give voice to personal stories of his encounters with racism. To articulate the depth of this action, I will place Douglass and Williams in conversation with Azoulay, Arendt, Laura Wexler, Shawn Michelle Smith, Maurice O. Wallace, and Ginger Hill to move away from Roland Barthes's triangulation of power in the photograph and pivot attention away from the idea of a singular creator to a more expansive equation that works to hear the internal voice of Williams. Having outlined the mechanics of Douglass's dialectic engagement with photography, I will then assert that through carefully crafted occupational self-portraits, Williams also enacted political trouble while performing an individualized version of Black freedom and citizenship. By doing so, the dissertation will argue that both Douglass and

Williams counter racism by making appeals to photographic viewers with the intention of reshaping the American imaginary well beyond their own lives.

The first chapter will consider the *cite* of trouble in occupation portraits of Williams. The dissertation will argue that Paul R. Williams's occupational photographs can be seen as a string of declarations affirming his abilities, and just as important, as American Studies theorist Laura Wexler describes Frederick Douglass's practice of sitting for portraits, "in presenting a conventionally legible, believable portrait that would suggest a very *particular* sense of his character to solidify his claims to nothing less than full humanity."[65] A seemingly benign professional necessity, Williams's photographs confronted striking risk with impressive gusto. What's more, Williams likely understood these photographs to be a testament to his work forging a connection to future viewers that could ensure the longevity of his achievements while also standing as a model to aspiring Black architects of the future. In using publicity photographs in this way, Williams realizes photography's capacity to spur social change as well as mark its shift in the historical record. Arguing with Wexler, I assert that like Douglass, Williams's occupation photographs were "visual affirmations [that] were more than issues of vanity or celebrity; [they] project[ed] an image of veracity and respectability [that] was the foundation upon which any man could claim citizenship and the protective and protected natural rights attached to that legal designation."[66]

---

[65] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation" in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 45.

[66] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation" in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 45-46.

Wexler utilizes the analogy of the projected image to describe the ephemeral path of Douglass's appeal as it travels through time and space from the picture plane to the viewer's sensory system. This dissertation uses a slightly different analogy to visualize the path, borrowing from architecture the useful term "sight line" to articulate a visual conduit that is facilitated by the three-dimensional shaping of space that the field of architecture, in the simplest terms, undertakes. Once the appeal is heard, a circuit between the photograph and viewer is connected. For many, this is a moment of empathy and understanding. For Azoulay, this is the moment in which the viewer must decide whether to act.

In the second chapter, I will consider the *sight* of trouble in occupation portraits of Williams to trace the formation of a mythology around certain biographic notes in the architect's practice. Williams's mythology works to establish a legacy and is interested in preventing the kind of social death that Douglass countered through his own photographic portraits. This chapter will follow the *sight lines* in several occupation photographs of Williams to illuminate Williams's social justice work rather than exploring the more typical "Architect to the Stars" trajectory. I will then place occupation portraits of Williams produced in the late 1940s and early 50s in conversation with Arendt to examine Williams's practice of freedom arguing that by performing the work of the architect for photographs, Williams worked against the erasure of his own subjectivity. After Williams's death, the chapter will explore how Williams's granddaughter, Karen E. Hudson picked up Williams's work, and photographs, with increasing urgency to fortify his legacy in response to the destruction of several of his buildings and an expectation of erasure.

The third chapter will continue an examination of Williams's "I Am a Negro" (1937) essay as it considers the *site* of trouble in his occupational portraits. I will argue that for Williams, who specialized in residential building, gaining access to white space by designing the very spaces that white people lived in was a subversive and necessary component of his political troubling of racism. The third chapter will connect with narratives in the two previous chapters to explore how the idea of a home was also important to Williams's concept of citizenship. As such, the dissertation will argue that in his occupation portraits, Williams contested legal segregation and racial covenants that prevented Black home ownership in the U.S. By portraying himself in occupation portraits as an exemplary Black man, and staging appeals that urged the Black community to themselves – individual by individual – enact Frederick Douglass's vision of the self-made man, this chapter asks how Williams held himself accountable, and was then held by his own community of remembrance?

Where the first and second chapters deal with the dynamics of the individual and race, as well as mortality and the Barthes's linking of photography to death, the third chapter directs the eye to the *polis* and the work of communities of remembrance. The dissertation's conclusion will work to connect the *sights cubed* formula, Williams's myth and Arendt's concept of natality to articulate how Williams's occupation photos, in Fred Moten's eloquent phrasing, have found a way *out of* death.

My library draws from a broad and transdisciplinary field that incorporates the history of photography, Black art history, political philosophy, and the history of segregation in the United States. Ariella Azoulay's *The Civil Contract of Photography* (2008) and *Civil Imagination: A*

Political Ontology of Photography (2012) are central to my examination. Hannah Arendt's *The Human Condition* (1958) is a crucial text to Azoulay's thesis which I will use to articulate Williams's political troubling along with the work of his communities of remembrance. I have found W. J. T. Mitchell's medium theory as developed in *What Do Pictures Want: The Lives and Loves of Images* (2006) to be an exciting complement to Azoulay's ideas. In addition, Arendt's *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) will be drawn upon to make claims regarding the future.

In keeping with classic cultural studies approaches, this dissertation seeks to connect to numerous disciplines as it applies the methodologies of photographic history to objects that have, up to this point, floated outside of art history's field of inquiry. As such, Roland Barthes's *Camera Lucida* (1981), "The Photographic Message," (1977) and "Electoral Photography" (1957) will offer critical levers for the *sights cubed* formula. Likewise, the Marxist critiques offered by Walter Benjamin's "Theses on the Philosophy of History" (1940), and Siobhan Angus's "Mining the History of Photography" (2021) will offer meaningful insight to Williams's work inside and out of the photograph's frame.

Several texts will provide counter-narratives that inform my analysis: Karen E. Hudson's biography of her grandfather, Paul R. Williams, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect* (1994), and the more critical examination of his legacy, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (1993) will offer biographic detail. Williams's voice will be gleaned from his "I Am a Negro" (1937) essay, his acceptance speech for the NAACP's Spingarn Medal in 1953, his acceptance speech for the Scottish Rite Masons of Oakland, CA Service Award in 1956, "An Architect Previews Tomorrow's Progress," along with a short piece, "If I Were Young Today,"

published in *Ebony* magazine in 1963. Additionally, multiple primary sources published in the *Los Angeles Times* and *New York Times* along with various Getty and University of Southern California publications will be used to account for the myth making surrounding Williams early life and professional experiences with racism.

Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith ed. *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (2012) along with Shawn Michelle Smith's *Photographic Returns* (2020) will provide valuable critical analysis on Frederick Douglass's practice of sitting and significantly informs the dissertation's consideration of *cites of trouble*. Matthew Fox-Amato's *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America* (2019) will provide important context to Frederick Douglass's occupation portraits, while John Stauffer's, Zoe Trodd's, and Celeste-Marie Bernier's *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (2015) will provide transcripts of Douglass's writings on photography along with visual analysis relating to Douglass's extensive array of photographic portraits.

This dissertation's consideration of *sites* of trouble will rely on Gerald Horne's *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (1995), Richard Rothstein's *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (2017), Andrea Gibbons's *City of Segregation: One Hundred Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles* (2018), and Mike Davis's and Jon Wiener's *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (2021). In addition, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's *Race for Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black*

Homeownership (2019) will provide valuable hindsight and critical perspective on Williams's view of home ownership as a vital means of overcoming racial politics. To extend the analysis, and listen to Williams's voice from another vantage point, Kristina Wilson's *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design* (2021) will be used to consider Williams's approach to Modernism, especially as it differed from the assumed neutrality of white practitioners.

Chapter 1

Cites of Trouble: A Tool for Remaking the American Imagination

> Theory originally meant a mental viewing, an idea or mental plan of the way to do something, and a formulation of apparent relationships or underlying principles of certain observed phenomena which had been verified to some degree. To have theory meant to hold considerable evidence in support of a formulated general principle explaining the operation of certain phenomena. Theory, then, is a set of knowledges. Some of these knowledges have been kept from us—entry into some professions and academia denied us. Because we are not allowed to enter discourse, because we are often disqualified and excluded from it, because what passes for theory these days is forbidden territory for us, it is *vital* that we occupy theorizing space, that we not allow whitemen and women solely to occupy it. By bringing in our own approaches and methodologies, we transform that theorizing space.
>
> \- Gloria Anzaldúa, 1990 [67]

A photograph of Paul R. Williams in the August 1963 edition of *Ebony* magazine taken by Howard Morehead[68] depicts the architect sitting at a drawing table and looking over his shoulder to offer a warm smile to viewers in a moment of repose (Fig. 2). The gesture and sentiment are familiar – the photo immediately recalls Judith Leyster's 1630 *Self-Portrait* in a starched ruff at the National Gallery of Art,[69] casually pausing her work at the easel to greet viewers as if they had just entered the studio (Fig. 3). Holding her palette, a rag, and a bevy of brushes in her left hand, and a long round pointed brush for details in her right hand – just as Williams holds a pencil to the surface of a rendering – both self-portraits communicate the advanced skill of the maker while also serving as marketing pieces for potential clients. Consequently, Williams's photo and Leyster's painted image might be more accurately described as occupation portraits.

---

[67] Gloria Anzaldúa, ed. "Haciendo caras, una entrada" in *Making Face, Making Soul Haciendo Caras: Creative and Critical Perspectives by Feminists of Color* (San Francisco: Aunt Lute Books, 1990), xxv.

[68] Howard Morehead is not identified as the photographer within the publication but was verified by email with Mary Velasco of *Getty Images* on December 21, 2022.

[69] "Judith Leyster, Self-Portrait, c. 1630," *National Gallery of Art*, https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.37003.html.

Set on the easel in front of her, the canvas that Judith Leyster paints is on full display, a gesture that in the 17th century was bold trouble – an unusual confrontation against patriarchal norms that were devised to prevent women's full participation in art markets. Leyster's confident handling of the brush (especially given the outlandish burdens of corsetry, expensive textiles, and that sensational lace-trimmed neck collar) and proximity to the canvas send a message of undeniable aptitude in spite of the constraints unduly placed on her gender. In similar fashion, Williams's pose is assured without being brash, he is surrounded by the tools of his trade (industrial swatches, trade manuals, blueprints, and even a cheesecake calendar affixed to the wall) emphatically connecting himself to the work that surrounds him. Viewers of these occupation portraits are met eye to eye by their subjects within a workspace that is intimate and comfortable, resulting in a consequential affinity between maker and viewer that allows the transmission of important appeals. Like Leyster, Williams enacts trouble in the performance of work and the access to white spaces that he makes explicit. Though neither portrait makes direct reference to a political cause, reading through the *citations* that each subject references opens a civil space where the subject portrayed argues their case. In revealing connections to other thinkers and makers, Leyster and Williams tap into an inertia that bolsters the trouble they engage.

As was surely the case with Leyster's painting in the 17th century, Williams's historical moment reverberates in the *Ebony* photograph. Los Angeles in 1963 – the city that Paul R. Williams based his practice and worked diligently to shape – elected its first Black representatives to the City Council: Billy G. Mills, Gilbert W. Lindsey, and Tom Bradley.[70] Yet, in this moment of

[70] Both Williams and Bradley attended Los Angeles Polytechnic High School. Bradley would also be elected Los Angeles's first Black mayor, serving from 1973 to 1993. His election was bolstered after L.A. police brutally attacked thousands of antiwar protestors at the Century Plaza Hotel in 1967. Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2021), 2.

seeming progress, racial tensions were at breaking points throughout the country. As James Baldwin describes, when visiting Selma, Alabama to participate in a drive to register Black voters called "Freedom Day" in October of the same year,

> I was scared physically, because I knew what could happen, and I was scared because I didn't know how to handle myself. The Deep South depends on a certain kind of—I didn't want to get anybody else in trouble. I didn't know what I would say to any of those cops. It's a principal terror when I'm there. There's a weird kind of etiquette which I can't observe, because I wasn't born there, and you can't learn it.[71]

The voter drive was successful, but fraught with the hostilities and confounding race-based hurdles that white authorities unrelentingly deployed to prevent the lawful registration of 58% of voters in the county.[72] Baldwin described the experience as "impossible" while relating,

> here is a town that's ruled by terror, that's ruled by mob. The white population and the police are all the mob, and there's no protection for any Negro in the town of any kind whatever. You cannot call the police. You'd be out of your mind. And the Negroes are not armed. They cannot protect themselves. It's not a rich town, so everyone there is, in one way or another, dependent for his livelihood on some white man. Now, to get, as Jim did, three hundred and seventy-five Negroes out to vote—.[73]

---

[71] Fern Marja Jackson, "Freedom Day, 1963: A Lost Interview with James Baldwin," *The New Yorker*, September 22, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/freedom-day-1963-a-lost-interview-with-james-baldwin.

[72] Fern Marja Jackson, "Freedom Day, 1963: A Lost Interview with James Baldwin," *The New Yorker*, September 22, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/freedom-day-1963-a-lost-interview-with-james-baldwin.

[73] Fern Marja Jackson, "Freedom Day, 1963: A Lost Interview with James Baldwin," *The New Yorker*, September 22, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/freedom-day-1963-a-lost-interview-with-james-baldwin.

As the niece of the writer interviewing Baldwin, Leslie J. Freeman notes, "'Freedom Day,' 1963, was a forerunner to events in Alabama in 1965—the 'Bloody Sunday' confrontation at the Edmund Pettus Bridge and the march from Selma to Montgomery—that finally led to the passage of the Voting Rights Act"[74] in the same year.

While the most vitriolic examples of racism are often sequestered to the South in the American imaginary – photographic and filmic images of peaceful protestors being chased by baton wielding, fire hose spraying, dog bating, and rifle bearing police near the Edmund Pettus Bridge on March 7, 1965 are among the most well-known and reproduced visual descriptions of racism in operation in the U.S. – Southern California, and Los Angeles specifically, significantly invested in a racial apartheid that denied Black and other people of color their rights as citizens and human beings, counter to the "widespread opinion" expressed to the McCone Commission following the unrest that errupted in Los Angeles neighborhood, Watts on August 11, 1965 "that 'Los Angeles was [considered] number 1 as the place where Negroes are better off,'" and was "favored by many black migrants, not only from the traditional southern areas but also increasingly deteriorating cities like St. Louis."[75] Consequently, the 1960s saw an incredible swell of Black organizing and protest across the nation marking a growing sense of impending rupture by 1963, the hundredth anniversary of the signing of the Emancipation Proclamation, and the year that an estimated 250,000 people gathered on the National Mall during the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom to demand substantive civil and economic rights legislation. As Mike Davis and Jon Wiener detail in *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (2020) "only

[74] Fern Marja Jackson, "Freedom Day, 1963: A Lost Interview with James Baldwin," *The New Yorker*, September 22, 2020, https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/freedom-day-1963-a-lost-interview-with-james-baldwin.

[75] Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (1995), (Virginia: Da Capo Pres, 1997), 50.

Detroit produced a larger and more ambitious civil rights united front [than Los Angeles] during what contemporaries called the 'Birmingham Summer.'"[76] The boiling tensions and palpable fear described by James Baldwin as he organized in Alabama could have easily been used to describe Los Angeles in the same year. As Davis and Wiener eloquently relate, idyllic images of white surfers on sun-drenched, palm tree lined beaches that characterized mass media's vision of Southern California in the 1960s was fiction. Instead, generations of fierce segregation in housing, education, and employment, coupled with brutal policing, and municipal and state policies that openly served white supremacy and cut off Black people from all manner of opportunities were "the true context underlying the creeping sense of dread and imminent chaos famously evoked by Joan Didion in her 1979 essay collection, *The White Album*. If 'helter skelter' was unleashed after 1970, the Manson gang were bit players compared to the institutions of law and order."[77]

Although likely unaware of Leyster's painted image when he posed,[78] Paul R. Williams *cites* many like-minded self-portraits in the *Ebony* portrayal. Williams's active gesture is not benign as it suggests the full process of conceiving, designing, and finally building the spaces he has been commissioned to construct – in this case, no less than a Mercedes Benz dealership.[79] As

[76] Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2021), 3.

[77] Mike Davis and Jon Wiener, *Set the Night on Fire: L.A. in the Sixties* (London: Verso, 2021), 3.

[78] Leyster's *Self-Portrait* had long been attributed to her contemporary, Frans Hals, as was most of her work. However, scholarly distinction and reattributions began in 1892 when the Louvre sought to verify attribution of another work purchased as one by Hals but eventually recognized as Leyster's when the Hals signature was determined to be a forgery, and the distinctive JL* monogram was finally recognized as Leyster's. Similarly, Leyster's *Self-Portrait* was reattributed in the 1930s, then was confirmed in 1949 when acquired by The National Gallery. The National Gallery of Art, "Judith Leyster, Self-Portrait, c. 1630," *National Gallery of Art*, https://www.nga.gov/collection/highlights/leyster-self-portrait.html.

[79] This may be the exterior to the Mercedes Showroom that Williams designed in the 1950s, the interior of which is illustrated in Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 170.

Williams offers a glimpse of his work in a stylized sketch held in his raised left hand and places the tip of a pencil in his right hand onto its surface, he confirms his abilities and joins a line of resistance to imperializing norms and racist covenants designed to prevent Black participation in the white economy. In this act, Williams performs the work of a professional architect, and as did Leyster relative to her gender, he engages in a radical affirmation of his Blackness that intends to counter any argument that would deny his capacity to act as a professional in his chosen field. In other words, like female painters of the modern period, Williams emphatically troubles an exclusively white field that he has been barred from with an image of himself doing the very work he was forbidden to do. What's more, he enacts this photographic performance at a volatile historical inflection point.

But Williams's *Ebony* photograph also *cites* another source that is perhaps closer to Williams in time and space, as well as intention – the photographs that Frederick Douglass sat for and distributed throughout his life. In this case, Williams's *citations* are pointed as they make visible the influence of the Black abolitionist leader on the architect's sense of self, particularly Douglass's resistance to racist visual rhetoric via the photographic image.

As Siobhan Angus argues in "Mining the History of Photography," where the act of crafting a photographic image has been given overdue attention, the labor behind the making of an eventual photographic image is systematically erased.[80] Starting from Angus's critique of the postmodern emphasis on the photographer's decisions and point of view, this chapter looks at multiple understandings of the concept of "work" that circulate around Paul R. Williams's

---

[80] Siobhan Angus, "Mining the History of Photography," in *Capitalism and the Camera: Essays on Photography and Extraction*, ed. Kevin Coleman and Daniel James (London: Verso, 2021), 55-73.

practice of sitting for photographs seeking to understand images of Williams through the *citations* that they make in order that the work of the photographic subject be made more visible. In doing so, this chapter argues that Williams troubles the systemic racism that deployed nearly insurmountable hurdles for Black men in joining white-collar professions, pursuing an education, and owning homes. Like Douglass, through the performance of a professional persona, Williams argued his worth, his humanity, and his rightful position as an American citizen. As Gloria Anzaldúa describes in this chapter's epigraph, through the troubling of racism via the visible and documented performance of work that he was prohibited from undertaking, Paul R. Williams occupies theorizing space in order that it may be transformed. Further, this chapter will argue that Williams's occupation photographs continue to affirm Williams's work by activating what Ariella Aïesha Azoulay describes as the civil space of photography.

Seeing How a Slave Was Made a Man

Frederick Douglass is widely understood to be the most photographed American of the 19th century, posing at least 160 times for photographs in his lifetime.[81] Beginning in the 1840s, not long after escaping from slavery in Maryland and soon after the introduction of the daguerreotype to the United States, Douglass began to pose for photographs that he then distributed and published as an extension of the abolitionist cause. He was likely inspired to undertake this practice by other abolitionists who "as a group . . . had their portraits taken with greater frequency, distributed them more effectively, and were more taken with photography,

[81] John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, introduction to *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American*, (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), ix.

than other"[82] activist groups in the era. Concomitantly, Douglass conceived his practice of sitting for photographs just before enslavers began to regularly photograph the people they enslaved,[83] as racial science took up the photograph as a modern tool for study, and as popular media teemed with racial stereotypes, lampoons, and derogatory imagery. Given its varied uses in his own time, as African American studies scholars, John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier argue in *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (2015), Douglass astutely conceived of the photographic image as multivalent, seeing in the photographic portrait specifically, the ability "to remove the contradictions between what ought to be and what was."[84]

Douglass remarkably determined at the outset of the photograph's public proliferation that emerging anti-Black visual rhetoric needed to be dealt with through an active parry that countered with opposing visual evidence to ward off the ill effects of pro-slavery imagery. When Douglass sat for photographs, he did so methodically and with intention, demonstrating both his humanity and an idealized vision of what freedom could look like. To boost, and possibly ensure the effect, Douglass combined the notoriety of his widely read autobiographies[85] with forceful oration that included burgeoning visual theory to convey a powerful clap back to anti-Black discourses. That Douglass's approach utilized these numerous forms has provided scholars since

[82] John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, introduction to *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), xiii.

[83] Matthew Fox-Amato, "Policing Personhood," in *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 18 - 68.

[84] John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, introduction to *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), xiii.

[85] Douglass published three autobiographies in his lifetime, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass* (1845), *My Bondage, My Freedom* (1855), and *Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1881 and revised 1892).

the 1960s[86] a wealth of insight into the lived experience of the photographic subject and painted rich textures to the performance of freedom in the photos that he sat for.

As Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith convincingly argue in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (2012), beyond his own practice of sitting for photographic portraits Douglass lectured so extensively on the photographic image that he "fashioned a theory of visuality years ahead of its time."[87] In particular, Douglass delivered several speeches concerning photography as the Civil War unfolded: "Lecture on Pictures" (1861), "Life Pictures" (1861), "Age of Pictures" (1862), and "Pictures and Progress" (1864 – 1865), expressing his deeply held belief in the power of the photograph to among other things, ignite social change. Douglass's thoughts on the photographic image in these speeches are sometimes meandering but offer early arguments that photographs be understood in artistic terms, and advising that because of their physical durability, the messages that photographs convey can be enduring.

For Douglass, the human desire for and capacity to represent their own likeness – the interest in representing others, as well as to have oneself represented – is precisely what distinguishes humans from other animals. In "Lecture on Pictures," Douglass stresses that "the power to make and to appreciate pictures belongs to man exclusively."[88] He reiterates this point in "Pictures and Progress," stating that "man is the only picture making animal in the world," and "he alone of all

[86] Sarah N. Roth (2007) "'How a Slave was Made a Man': Negotiating Black Violence and Masculinity in Antebellum Slave Narratives, *Slavery and Abolition*, 28:2, 256, DOI: 10.1080/01440390701428048.

[87] Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 9.

[88] Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures," in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 131.

the inhabitants of earth has the capacity and passion for pictures."[89] That the photograph happened to create two-dimensional representations that appeared stunningly similar to what the eye sees was simply a convenient factor of modern technology to Douglass. What was more important to him was that the photographic image held the nimble ability to portray the humanity of Black folks, even while, and perhaps, especially because, all sorts of images were being used to support the opposite claims. Writing with acerbity against racial scientists whom he knew to be developing such contrary claims, Douglass chastises the

> so-called learned naturalists, archeologists, and ethnologists [who] have professed some difficulty in settling upon a fixed, certain, and definite line separating the lowest man from the highest animal. To all such I commend the fact that man is everywhere a picture-making animal . . .. The rule I believe is without exception and may be safely commended to the Notts and Gliddens, who are just now puzzled with the question as to whether the African slave should be treated as a man or an ox.[90]

As Douglass lectured, he also sat for photographs, distributing them to like-minded individuals, authorizing their reproduction and sale by photographers, and eventually publishing them in the full range of photographic and publication methods available in his lifetime. When viewed as a

---

[89] Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress" in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 166.

[90] Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures," in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 131.

series of acts, it is clear that Douglass "experimented with poses, gestures, and styles"[91] in the earliest of his self-portraits eventually arriving at a visual recipe that repeatedly performed "defiant citizen" and "elder statesman."[92] Stauffer, Trodd, and Bernier expound that through the photographic evolution of Douglass's visual persona, "Douglass wrote himself into public existence, evolving over the years as a freedom fighter, steely visionary, [and] wise prophet" all while "undermin[ing] the foundations of slavery and racism."[93] Through multiple photographic portraits over time, Douglass made literal the famous declaration written in his first autobiography: "You have seen how a man was made a slave; you shall see how a slave was made a man."[94] This gesture was at the heart of what Douglass saw as photography's greatest strength – in its modernity, accessibility, and eventual reproducibility, photography formed a conduit capable of affirming the humanity of Black people while also advancing the cause of their full enfranchisement in the American project.

Douglass writes in "Lecture on Pictures," that "success is the admitted standard of American greatness, and it is marvelous to observe how readily it also becomes the standard of manly beauty."[95] When Douglass fashioned himself before the camera, he worked to embody a vision of success that white Americans would especially recognize, with an emphasis on embodying the

[91] John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "The Photographs," in *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 1.

[92] John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "The Photographs," in *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 1.

[93] John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, introduction to *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), xxv.

[94] Frederick Douglass, *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (New York: Signet Classics, 2005), 76.

[95] Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures," in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 130.

idea of a citizen. A famous daguerreotype of Douglass made by Samuel J. Miller between 1847 and 1852 exemplifies his formula (Fig. 4).[96] As always, Douglass is dressed impeccably. His fashionable side part emphasizes his masculinity, while his neatly pressed clothing, high collar, and embellished tie and vest work in unison to convey Douglass's standing as a respected scholar and orator. There is no decorative backdrop employed, and the proximity of the camera to Douglass resulted in a calculated absence of studio furnishings or props within the frame. In the liminal space that is created, Douglass hovers in between, or possibly outside of, time. Douglass poses with what would become a characteristic scowl, looking angry if not vexed, and appears to be actively reading the situation, producing an effect not unlike the compelling nature of his speeches – the viewer is drawn in and persuasively coaxed through a material ground (the photograph) that is common and familiar. The resulting image is distinctively Douglass: viewers are compelled to look intently at the speaker's formidable features and are immediately confronted with visual evidence of all the features that make a good citizen – a calculating mind, the ability to reason and deliberate, the confidence to take a position, and the strength to stand in opposition to tyranny.

A pause is necessary here to articulate Douglass's work more precisely. French semiotician, Roland Barthes writes nearly a century after Douglass's photographs in an apt essay from 1957 concerning photographs of political candidates that the "more common" three-quarter pose that Douglass preferred "suggests the tyranny of the ideal" as it typically features a "gaze [that] dissolves nobly into the future [that is] not confrontational yet [has the characteristics of]

[96] Ginger Hill, "Rightly Viewed: Theorizations of Self in Frederick Douglass's Lectures on Pictures," in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 48.

dominating and fecundating a modestly indefinite elsewhere."[97] As with Douglass's self-portraits, Barthes describes formal political portraits as "ascensional, the countenance raised toward a supernatural light which lures it upward, elevating it to regions of a superior humanity, where the candidate attains the Olympus of lofty sentiments, where all political contradiction is resolved."[98] Although Douglass's gaze was typically aimed somewhere out-of-frame, he emphatically directs his gaze downward or straight-on making clear that his appeal is to the human viewer rather than an omnipotent entity. Making the analogy more explicit in the "Photographic Message" (1977) when writing about a 1960 photo of President John F. Kennedy, Barthes explains that

> the photograph clearly only signifies because of the existence of a store of stereotyped attitudes which form ready-made elements of signification (eyes raised heavenwards, hands clasped). A 'historical grammar' of iconographic connotation ought thus to look for its material in painting, theatre, associations of ideas, stock metaphors, etc., that is to say, precisely in 'culture.'[99]

It is this historical grammar that Williams so perceptively conjures in his citations of Douglass's photographs. While Douglass fashioned self-portraits that are remarkable in their fortitude, and confident in seeding a mythic language, Paul R. Williams then cultivates the iconographic connotations to further expand upon the visualization of the Black citizen that Douglass conceptualized.

---

[97] Roland Barthes, "Electoral Photogeny," in *Mythologies* (1957) trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013), 183.

[98] Roland Barthes, "Electoral Photogeny," in *Mythologies* (1957) trans. Richard Howard (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013), 183.

[99] Roland Barthes, "The Photographic Message," in *IMAGE – MUSIC – TEXT* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977), 22.

As numerous scholars have made clear, Douglass saw in the photograph a dialectic tool capable of conveying and promoting complex anti-racist arguments. Through strategic rhetoric that often utilized the frenzied popularity of photographic portraiture to coax compassion and break tensions with audiences who were likely expected to be offended by the circumstance of a Black man speaking forcefully from a position (such as a lectern in the "front" of a room) that coded as authoritative.[100] In this work, Douglass anticipated a long line of Black scholarship that argues that racist imagery is a facet of larger systems of oppression at work.[101] He suggests this when he writes:

> Some say it is the slaveholders who have brought this great evil upon us. I do not assent even to this. Others say that the real cause of all our troubles may be traced to the busy tongues and pens of the abolitionists. The cause is deeper down than sections, slaveholders, or abolitionists. These are but the hands of the clock. The moving machinery is behind the face. The machinery moves not because of the hands, but the hands because of the machinery. To make the hands go right you must make the machinery go right. The trouble is fundamental.[102]

In his speeches, Douglass uses the photograph to join his audience on common ground to effectively argue that the Civil War had made visible a fundamental flaw in the American project, specifically that the Constitution, as it slips away from the *Declaration of Independence's* proclamation that "we hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are

---

[100] Indeed, Douglass's first speaking engagement on December 3, 1860, at the Tremon Temple Baptist Church on the first anniversary of John Brown's execution was shut down by a violent mob violence. "A Plea for Free Speech in Boston (1860)," *National Constitution Center* website, https://constitutioncenter.org/the-constitution/historic-document-library/detail/frederick-douglass-a-plea-for-free-speech-in-boston-1860.

[101] Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., "Introduction," in *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 8-9.

[102] Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures" in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 136.

created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness." Douglass urges his audience to "accept the incontestable truth of the irrepressible conflict"[103] to "have done with the idea that [the] old union is either desirable or possible," and "banish from your minds the last lingering shadow of a hope that your government can ever rest secure on a mixed basis of freedom and slavery."[104] What he definitively calls for is a new constitution based in democratic principles of equality.

Douglass explored the contradictory states of the photographic image with curiosity – that the photographic image could affirm his humanity but was also used by racial science to deny his intellect and agency – finding the paradox to be a necessary component of the photograph's ability to stir debate. Indeed, he cogently advises that photography nurtures fecund space for social progress:

> The process by which man is able to posit his own subjective nature outside of himself, giving it form, color, space, and all the attributes of distinct personality, so that it becomes the subject of distinct observation and contemplation, is at [the] bottom of all effort and the germinating principles of all reform and all progress.[105]

[103] Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures," in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 138.

[104] Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures," in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 138.

[105] Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 170.

In other words, the ability to see oneself from another person's point of view enables humans to self-reflect,[106] while the capacity for interiority is a distinguishing characteristic of humanity: "But for this, the history of the beast of the field would be the history of man. It is the picture of life contrasted with the fact of life, the ideal contrasted with the real, which makes criticism possible."[107] He further expounds that "self-criticism" (assisted by the photographic image) generates "the highest attainments of human excellence [and] arises out of the power we possess of making ourselves objective to ourselves–[because we] can see our interior selves as distinct personalities."[108] For Douglass, the ability to reflect and engage in self-criticism is fundamental towards enacting change:

> Where there is no criticism there is no progress, for the want of progress is not felt where such want is not made visible by criticism. It is by looking upon this picture and upon that which enables us to point out the defects of the one and the perfections of the other.[109]

In thinking about the optics of the camera itself – that light traveling through a small hole in an otherwise light-tight box inverts then projects onto the surface opposite the hole, illuminating that surface with an upside-down view of the scene outside – Douglass lands upon the concept of

---

[106] Maurice O. Wallace and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., introduction to *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 7.

[107] Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 170.

[108] Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 171.

[109] Frederick Douglass, "Pictures and Progress," in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 170.

interiority – that one thinks through images in one's mind's eye, possibly hypothesizing that memories, and therefore history can be understood through these visual thoughts. In his speeches on photography, Douglass sets up a view of the mind from the inside, as if inside a camera obscura, articulating an internalized view of subjectivity, then arguing that the interiority that photographs promote, is what distinguishes them from painted, sculpted, or drawn images – what he called "thought pictures–the outstanding headlands of the meandering shores of life, . . . [that] are points to steer by on the broad sea of thought and experience. They body forth in living forms and colors the ever varying lights and shadows of the soul."[110] For Douglass, the mechanics of photographic production offered an analogy that clarified a complex sense of the photographic subject and an intricate experience of both objective observation and subjective influence that the photographic viewer participates in. What's more, it highlighted the very features that Douglass found most compelling about the photographic image, explaining why he believed they were the most appropriate tool for combatting racism.

Occupation Portraits

Given these conditions, describing Douglass's portraits as occupation portraits generates a productive tension that recognizes the liminal state he negotiated once he secured his own physical freedom from slavery, then worked to remake the American imagination. When looking at the range of photographs that Douglass sat for, we see him wrestling with the problem of coupling the abstract qualities of a learned man, with the characteristics of the "self-made

[110] Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures" in John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, "Douglass's Writings on Photography," *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), 131.

man,"[111] – the idea of the working professional that became a critical component of what he understood as the formation of a full-fledged citizen of the United States. As Ginger Hill further extrapolates, "challenging liberal notions of labor as the only form of property that rightfully blurs distinctions between selfhood and things, portrait photography, unlike any previous medium . . . allows one to own one's self as a visible object, not as an inalienable, embodied personality."[112] Surely Douglass understood this tension, and actively negotiated within it as he sat for portraits and lectured on photography.

As a genre of image, the occupation portrait is amongst the first distinct class of image to develop as photographic processes became easier, cheaper, more reliable, and thus more accessible to everyday people. Typically portraying middle-class people dressed in their working garb and posed with the accoutrements of their specific trade, occupation photographs are an extension of artist's painted self-portraits such as Judith Leyster's. As industrialization orchestrated dramatic shifts in the way people lived and conceived of their work, occupation photographs offered a means of resistance to the alienating effects of the assembly line and increasing distance between the worker, the means of production, and profits realized because of their labor.

By the mid 19th century, in studios across the United States, working men, and occasionally women, posed with studio props when available, or brought their own tools into the

---

[111] This is a reference to speeches given by Douglass starting in 1859 that connects to Benjamin Franklin's autobiography, see: Frederick Douglass, *Frederick Douglass Papers: Speech, Article, and Book File, -1894; Speeches and Articles by Douglass, -1894; Undated; "Self-Made Men," address before the students of the Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, Pa.,* https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1187900540/.

[112] Ginger Hill, "Rightly Viewed: Theorizations of Self in Frederick Douglass's Lectures on Pictures," in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 53-54.

photographer's studio to participate in a formulation of American identity that associated hard work as a trait of citizenry – what Douglass encapsulated in the notion of the "self-made man." Looking pointedly at the viewer, the subjects enacted equations such as: young man + hammer + chisel = mason, or woman + sewing machine + fabric = seamstress. The photographs frequently seem to communicate, "I am not a cog in a wheel, but a person who is proud of the work I do." In this way, occupation photographs constitute the emergence of a public identity connected to the work and skills that one uses to participate in the economy. By participating in the economy, photographic subjects were equally declaring their place in the newly formed nation. For Douglass and other Black photographic subjects, this declaration was magnified further by the assertion of their humanity, demonstrated possession of their own selfhood, and affirmed ownership of their labor fixed by the critically evaluated photograph.

In the daguerreotype portrait taken in Miller's studio, Douglass conveys the qualities of a leader and voter, drawing the viewer's gaze to his features as if daring anyone to discount the fact of his freedom with the obviously flawed methods of racial science. As Ginger Hill argues,

> Douglass was highly invested in presenting a conventionally legible, believable portrait that would suggest a very particular sense of his character to solidify his claims to nothing less than full humanity. These visual affirmations were more than issues of vanity or celebrity; projecting an image of veracity and respectability was the foundation upon which any man could claim citizenship and the protective and protected natural rights attached to that legal designation. Similar to the panegyrics to Daguerre [that Douglass references in the

> introduction to "Pictures and Progress"], Douglass's portraits are visual arguments for a liberal conception of freedom that prizes individuality.[113]

When Douglass sat for photographs, he pointedly described himself within liberal ideals – that he was a free and thinking individual who owned property, and embraced modern concepts of consent, equality, and civil rights. For Douglass, the act of sitting for a portrait constituted a perpetual, but necessary practice of imagining what freedom looked like. Furthermore, Douglass anticipated contemporary arguments finding capacity for change in photography's ontological connectivity to the past, present, and future. As Shawn Michelle Smith argues in *Photographic Returns: Racial Justice and the Time of Photography* (2020) "but even as Douglass believed that photography forecast new futures, he also understood that photographs would uniquely keep the past alive in the present. In other words, photography would create forward momentum with a retrospective pull."[114] To reiterate an important point, by drawing this line as the Civil War raged Douglass proposed that photography could be a vital tool in re-imagining the union, and profoundly, what freedom could look like to future Americans.[115] For Douglass, who was sure that the union would prevail,[116] visualizing freedom was paramount particularly for the

---

[113] Ginger Hill, "Rightly Viewed: Theorizations of Self in Frederick Douglass's Lectures on Pictures," in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 45-46.

[114] Shawn Michelle Smith, "Looking Forward and Looking Back: Rashid Johnson and Frederick Douglass on Photography," in *Photographic Returns: Racial Justice and the Time of Photography* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 17.

[115] I am indebted to Laura Wexler's brilliant essay, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation," in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 28 -29 in drawing this conclusion.

[116] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation," in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 19.

emancipated to forge a better idea of citizenship than the *Constitution* had allowed – what Douglass described as "right" and "rightly viewed."[117]

Citing Frederick Douglass

Paul R. Williams was born in Los Angeles on February 18, 1894[118] not long after his parents, Chester Stanley Williams and Lila Wright Williams moved from Memphis, Tennessee with their first son, Chester Jr., as part of the first Great Migration seeking an arid climate that might remediate the tuberculosis that both parents suffered from.[119] Mr. Williams set up a fruit stand on what is now known as Olvera Street,[120] while Ms. Williams took up dressmaking,[121] and the family established themselves in an integrated neighborhood[122] in what is now L.A.'s Fashion District. Williams's father died in 1896, as did his mother, two years later. With five years difference in age, their orphaned sons were fostered by separate families who attended the First

[117] Frederick Douglass, "Lecture on Pictures" quoted in Laura Wexler, "A More Perfect Likeness," in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 24.

[118] Though this connection is coincidental, it's worth noting that Frederick Douglass did not know the exact date of his birth but settled on February 14th in part because he recalled that his last memory of his mother involved her bringing him a cake in the shape of a heart." Scott Bombay, "The story behind the Frederick Douglass birthday celebration," *National Constitution Center*, February 14, 2023, https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-story-behind-the-frederick-douglass-birthday-celebration.

[119] Royal Kennedy Rogers, *Hollywood's Architect: The Paul R. Williams Story*, directed and produced by Royal Kennedy Rodgers and Kathy McCampbell Vance, (February 6, 2020; Los Angeles: PBS So Cal), https://www.pbs.org/video/hollywoods-architect-3prwsa/.

[120] Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 11, and Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect*, New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 6.

[121] The Paul R. Williams Project, "Visual Timeline: The Remarkable Life of Paul R. Williams," *KCET*, posted on February 5, 2020, https://www.kcet.org/shows/hollywoods-architect-the-paul-r-williams-story/visual-timeline-the-remarkable-life-of-paul-revere-williams.

[122] Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect*, New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 6-7.

African Methodist Episcopal church with their family.[123 & 124] Charles and Emily Clarkson welcomed Paul into their home, and the brothers were able to remain in contact until Chester Jr. died in 1924.[125]

Williams notes in his autobiography[126] that he developed a love of drawing as a young child, which was encouraged by his foster family[127] and cohort, who knew him as the "class artist."[128] A family friend who was a local builder introduced young Paul to the idea of becoming an architect,[129] an idea that intrigued Williams because he had only heard of one Black architect, Booker T. Washington's son-in-law, William S. Pittman.[130]

As can be seen in the image taken in 1927 at the Riley Residence in Ojai (Fig. 1), when Williams posed for occupation portraits, he too self-fashioned an image of American citizenry amidst rampant proliferation of anti-Black imagery. Like Douglass, Williams dressed with calculation in dapper suits and styled his hair in a manner that conveyed his personal style and aspirations

---

[123] Christopher Hawthorne, "Paul Revere Williams: From the Center to the Margins and Back Again," *Architect*, April, 2017, https://www.architectmagazine.com/awards/aia-awards/paul-revere-williams-from-the-center-to-the-margins-and-back-again_o.

[124] The First A.M.E. is the oldest Black church in Los Angeles, established in 1872 by nurse and real estate magnate Biddy Mason and other Black Angelinos on land donated by Mason after legally establishing her emancipation from enslavers who had brought her from Mississippi to California as part of a Mormon caravan that settled in San Bernardino, CA. "Bridget 'Biddy' Mason," *National Park Service*, https://www.nps.gov/people/biddymason.htm.

[125] Royal Kennedy Rogers, *Hollywood's Architect: The Paul R. Williams Story*, directed and produced by Royal Kennedy Rodgers and Kathy McCampbell Vance, (February 6, 2020; Los Angeles: PBS So Cal), https://www.pbs.org/video/hollywoods-architect-3prwsa/.

[126] Paul R. Williams kept memoirs and apparently wrote several drafts for an autobiography that he hoped to publish. His granddaughter, Karen E. Hudson appears to have used this material in each of her books on her grandfather, and likely provided material to the directors, producers and writers of the PBS documentary on Williams, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*.

[127] Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 11.

[128] Shashank Bengali, "Williams the Conqueror," Trojan Family Magazine, Spring 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20130527154825/http://www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/trojan_family/spring04/williams1.html.

[129] Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 59.

[130] Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 11.

explaining in the 1963 *Ebony* article, "If I Were Young Today," "that a Negro architect with a flair gets more publicity today than the average architect."[131] However, where Douglass formulated a forceful image to refute any contestation of his freedom, Williams engaged in a more reserved subversive troubling. Where Douglass insisted upon a tough and unrelenting gaze, Williams typically meets the viewer's gaze with a soft and inviting smile – something Douglass famously refused to do until nearing the end of his life.[132] Where Douglass crafted a minimal background, void of superfluous furnishings and studio props, Williams's self-portraits more easily sit in the genre of occupation photography with the architect frequently photographed standing in front of buildings he designed, or inside an office space with his sketches and maquettes. Where Douglass published several autobiographies which included accounts, as did his speeches, of the treachery and violence he experienced under bondage, Williams was reluctant to share the difficulties he endured because of racism and segregation.[133]

Despite these differences, both Douglass and Williams enter into a contractual agreement with their viewers. As the photographic subjects look out to future viewers, they make an appeal to be seen as full citizens. As an elder Black leader, esteemed social reformer, and respected statesman, Frederick Douglass must have loomed large in Paul R. Williams's identity. Douglass

[131] Paul R. Williams, "If I Were Young Today," *Ebony* (August 1963), 56.

[132] Douglass smiles in one of the last photographs he sat for, taken October 31, 1894, in New Bedford, Massachusetts by Phineas C. Headley, Jr. and James E. Reed. Douglass explained that he did not smile for photos because he did not want images of himself to be read as the submissive minstrel, John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, introduction to *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), xxv.

[133] Karen E. Hudson recounts in several sources that her grandfather did not discuss racism in the household. Royal Kennedy Rogers, *Hollywood's Architect: The Paul R. Williams Story*, directed and produced by Royal Kennedy Rodgers and Kathy McCampbell Vance, (February 6, 2020; Los Angeles: PBS So Cal), https://www.pbs.org/video/hollywoods-architect-3prwsa/, and Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 11, and Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect*, New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 17.

continued lecturing throughout his life, indeed up to his dying day in February 1895, nearly a year after Williams's birth, in which he spoke at a meeting of the National Council of Women in Washington, D.C. before apparently having a heart attack.[134] As a professional architect, Williams may not have articulated an intention to mimic Douglass's practice of sitting for photographs, but the demands of his career and the circumstances of having to break through the color line in order to practice architecture cultivated similar opportunities for self-styling. Fittingly, in 1926, Williams confirms Douglass's importance to Black Angelinos by including a bas relief profile portrait of the abolitionist on Los Angeles's 28th Street YMCA,[135] which was founded by L.A.'s Black community (Fig. 5).

Indeed, photographs of Williams at work offer remarkable testimony to Douglass's influence. In citing Douglass's self-portraits, Williams troubles the very obstacles that continued to threaten Black citizenship in ways that Williams otherwise did not find permissible or professionally strategic. As Christopher Hawthorne writes for the *L.A. Times*, "Williams never had the luxury of thinking of architecture and race as separate. His career was one long negotiation between the two, an extended investigation of the ways that in 20th century Los Angeles they were thoroughly and often cruelly intertwined."[136] As a result, the citations that reverberate in Williams's occupation photos work to nurture the mythology that Williams, like Douglass, was as a model of social progress.

---

[134] "Frederick Douglass's Original New York Times Obituary from 1895," *New York Times, February 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/14/obituaries/frederick-douglass-dead-1895.html?searchResultPosition=4.*

[135] Curiously, Williams used a profile view of Douglass with beard and mustache rather than the three-quarter view that Douglass used more often in photographs. The sculptural relief was likely based on a Cabinet Card image taken in Chicago by Lydia J. Cadwell on January 5, 1875. Booker T. Washington is also featured on the façade, with a frontal gaze.

[136] Christopher Hawthorne, "For the late L.A. architect Paul R. Williams, national honor overlaps with a bleak anniversary," *Los Angeles Times*, April 28, 2017, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/museums/la-et-cm-paul-r-williams-gold-medal-20170428-story.html.

An occupation portrait by Carl Van Vechten, photographer and patron of many Harlem Renaissance artists and musicians, that illustrates a 1937 essay by Williams entitled, "I Am a Negro" for *American Magazine* offers a constructive example of how myth and occupation photographs work alongside as elements of Williams's performance of citizenship (Fig. 6). A similar photograph taken during the same sitting is used in the privileged position of frontispiece to Karen E. Hudson's, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (Fig. 7).[137] Both photographs stray from Douglass's minimal backgrounds by depicting the architect in front of decorative paper depicting fern like designs. Williams sits in a carved wooden chair that is not visible in the closely cropped image from the "I Am a Negro" essay. He is turned to a three-quarter view, and casts a slight downward gaze while looking at the camera/viewer and leaning slightly towards the camera. Williams's face is side lit, which casts a soft shadow on the right side of his face. His persona oversees the essay below with a twinkle in his eye and the demure smile seen in the Ojai 1927 photograph. The photograph is set against a headline that combines a mid-century script that personalizes the "I am a," while the word "Negro" is set in a capped serif font that dramatizes the difference between the singular and group identities declared in the essay's title.

The viewer/reader is welcomed by Williams's occupation photograph as though the architect stands at the front door of one of his buildings signaling an invitation to enter inside. Asking in the opening paragraphs, "Exactly what is my position in this nation which grants me the political

[137] I am indebted to James Ford III and his work on Phillis Wheatley in illuminating the special place that the frontispiece holds for Black scholars such as Phillis Wheatley whose image, likely based on a lost painting by Scipio Moorhead, was included in *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral* (1773). Frederick Douglass's image was likewise included as a frontispiece in his autobiographies. For early Black authors, the frontispiece was the site where they vehemently declared their humanity and intellect.

rights of citizenship?"[138] Williams deferentially argues that Black people do not form a monoculture. He explains that Blacks "are more than a tenth of the population of the United States," and therefore ought not be reduced to simple stereotypes, exclaiming that "when all is said and done, [Blacks are] individuals, subject to the same laws which govern the mental and spiritual evolution of all individuals."[139] Further, Williams argues, "we march forward singly, not as a race. Deal with me, and with the other men and women of my race, as individual problems, not as a race problem, and the race problem will soon cease to exist!"[140]

After having decided to become an architect and announcing his plans to a high school instructor,[141] Williams describes with indignation that the instructor indelicately declared, "that people of my own race build neither fine houses nor expensive business buildings" and further advised, "you have the ability – but use it some other way. Don't butt your head futilely against the stone wall of race prejudice."[142] Reasoning that he had "arrived at a turning point" Williams determined "if I allow the fact that I Am a Negro to checkmate my will to do, now, I will inevitably form the habit of being defeated."[143]

Surprisingly, Williams further opines that,

---

[138] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59.

[139] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59.

[140] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59.

[141] Williams describes the naysayer as an "instructor" in Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 161, as does Karen E. Hudson in *Paul R. Williams: Classic Hollywood Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 2021), 11. In "If I Were Young Today," *Ebony*, August 1963, 56. Williams describes the naysayer as a "student counselor." However, while paraphrasing her grandfather, Hudson describes the naysayer as a "guidance counselor" and "adviser" in Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 11 & 12. It may be that there were multiple authority figures at Sentous School and Los Angeles's Polytechnic High School who discouraged Williams in this way. For consistency with the text under examination, I will use the term that Williams utilized in his 1937 essay.

[142] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 161.

[143] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 161.

> white Americans have a reasonable basis for their prejudice against the Negro race, and if that prejudice is ever to be overcome it must be through the efforts of individual Negroes to rise above the average cultural level of their kind. Therefore, I owe it to myself and to my people to accept this challenge.[144]

With a degree of entitlement, Williams naively concludes that "White Americans, in spite of every prejudice, are essentially fair-minded people who cannot refuse to respect courage and honest effort. They will, therefore, give me an opportunity to prove my worth as an individual.[145]

Considering his work moving against racism to become a successful architect, Williams explains:

> My hope for success was based largely upon my conviction that racial prejudice is usually blind, that it is less often the result of reason and personal experience than the offspring of inherited ideas and a hasty, American tendency to lump all things which look alike into a single category. I had noticed that most whites, especially those most bitterly prejudiced, seldom regard Negroes with enough attention to distinguish one from another. And while I felt the futility of any attempt to break down their aversion to my race, I believed that if I could shock, or startle, or in any way induce those white people to regard me, not as 'just a Negro,' but as Paul Williams, an *individual* Negro, I might then be able to sell my ability.[146]

[144] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59, 161.
[145] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59, 161.
[146] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59, 161.

To be blunt, unlike Douglass, Williams does not stand in resistance on behalf of his race. Rather, Williams argues the case for his exception, appealing to white readers to see him as an individual before recognizing his Blackness.

As Barthes argues, “the press photograph is a message.”[147] Williams is able to meet the white reader’s gaze in the “I Am a Negro” essay in part by asserting his individuality – a characteristic that was increasingly associated with citizenship in the United States as Communist and Socialist causes stirred revolution in Europe, and later, South America. In doing so, Williams conveys an objectivity that is supported by the photograph’s “purely ‘denotative’ status,” which Barthes explains, “has every chance of being mythical (these are the characteristics that common sense attributes to the photograph).”[148] In this instance, Barthes’s observation that with modern mass media,

> the text constitutes a parasitic message designed to connote the image, to ‘quicken’ it with one or more second-order signifieds. In other words, and this is an important historical reversal, the image no longer *illustrates* the words; it is now the words which, structurally, are parasitic on the image”[149]

rings bitingly truthful. Williams’s conservative approach to social justice casts a skeptical shadow on the anti-racist work that I argue he was nonetheless engaged.

[147] Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in *IMAGE – MUSIC – TEXT* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977), 15.

[148] Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in *IMAGE – MUSIC – TEXT* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977), 19.

[149] Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in *IMAGE – MUSIC – TEXT* trans. Stephen Heath (New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977), 25.

Considering Frederick Douglass's "Lecture on Pictures," Laura Wexler argues that Douglass, who was "troubled by Lincoln's hesitation to arm black troops"[150] in his first inaugural address, uses the experiences of sitting for photographs then looking at those images to "[propose] that the new technology of photography humanizes the image of the enslaved so that black men might be more widely seen as suitable recruits to the Union forces."[151] As Wexler describes, in Douglass's 1865 revision of the speech "he [then] encourages Lincoln and the country to anticipate the successful end of the war" and to see photography as capable of "mak[ing] a likeness of the 'more perfect Union' the Constitution had originally failed to deliver."[152] For Douglass, the Civil War laid bare fundamental flaws in the way that the U.S. Constitution conceives the citizen, arguing in his speeches as well as through photographs of himself performing as a citizen that the nation urgently needed to reformulate the concept of citizenship[153] in order that democracy be sustained. In other words, what Douglass sought through spoken and visualized rhetoric is a stark reimagining of what it means to be an American.[154] When Douglass asserted that a slave became a man, he clearly understood

---

[150] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation" in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 19.

[151] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation" in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 19.

[152] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation" in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 19.

[153] I'd like to note here that Arendt adamantly distinguished between citizenship and power. For her, citizenship involved the right to have rights, the ability to appear and have one's voice heard. Azoulay advises that "citizenship, like power, is not and should not be considered as property. . . . Citizenship . . . is not merely a status, but a form of participation in a political space that in some respects resemble Hannah Arendt's conception of power." Ariella Azoulay, introduction to *The Civil Contract of Photography* (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 497n1. Further, Azoulay writes, "in *On Violence*, Arendt criticizes the way power is conceived as property, 'Power corresponds to the human ability not just to act, but to act in concert. Power is never the property of an individual.'" See: Hannah Arendt, *On Violence*, (New York, Harvest Books, 1970), 143.

[154] Laura Wexler, "A More Perfect Likeness," in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press), 2012, 18-40 as well as Laura Wexler, "The Purloined Image," in Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski ed., *Photography and the Optical Unconscious*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).

manhood as a precondition of citizenship, and thus manifested an overtly masculine, stately, and authoritative self-portrait. As Stauffer, Trodd, and Bernier write, Douglass "'out-citizened' white citizens, at a time when most whites did not believe that African Americans should be citizens."[155]

While Williams's attempt to characterize his personal struggle with racism may very well be overly optimistic, it is important to emphasize that Williams's address to *American Magazine's* white readership in the 1930s and Douglass's in the 19th century were each calculated affronts to social injustice. Williams may express accord with now unpopular segregationist viewpoints, but he is unequivocally against racist notions of Black inferiority. Like Douglass, in his occupation photographs, Williams fashions his success through codes easily deciphered by white Americans to demonstrate Black excellence and thereby expand possibilities for other Black Americans. As Laura Wexler argues, Douglass's project of sitting for photographs demonstrates that he saw the occupation photograph as "a tool for remaking the American imagination."[156] I argue that Williams likewise saw photography as a dialectic tool capable of expanding how Americans perceive citizenship and citizenry alike.

[155] John Stauffer, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier, introduction to *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015), xiii.

[156] Laura Wexler, "A More Perfect Likeness," in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 18.

Chapter 2

Sights of Trouble: Trying to Be Remembered

> One of the dangers of being a Black American is being schizophrenic, and I mean "schizophrenic" in the most literal sense. To be a Black American is in some ways to be born with the desire to be white. It's a part of the price you pay for being born here, and it affects every Black person. We can go back to Vietnam, we can go back to Korea. We can go back for that matter to the First World War. We can go back to W.E.B. Du Bois–an honorable and beautiful man–who campaigned to persuade Black people to fight in the First World War, saying that if we fight in this war to save this country, our right to citizenship can never, never again be questioned–and who can blame him? He really meant it, and if I'd been there at that moment I would have said so too perhaps. Du Bois believed in the American dream. So did Martin. So did Malcolm. So do I. So do you. That's why we're sitting here.
>
> \- James Baldwin, 1984 [157]

Introducing Paul R. Williams with biographic notes, as I have done in the first chapter participates in a mythology of the architect that argues a place of honor for him in the history of architecture, as a successful Angelino businessman, and as a leader in Black communities. However, reliance on biography follows a pattern established in the study of women artist's work in which the art objects are made secondary to the artist's biography and analyzed almost exclusively through the personal struggles of the art maker. While I agree with the feminist mantra that the personal is political,[158] the use of biography to the exclusion of other methodologies to build understanding of women's artistic production, and by the extension that this dissertation draws, the work of Paul R. Williams relegates the artistic contributions of these cultural producers to side bars and minor histories while maintaining the dominance of white

[157] James Baldwin and Audre Lorde, "Revolutionary Hope: A Conversation Between James Baldwin and Audre Lorde" originally published in *Essence*, December 1984, 72-73 and republished in Catherine Morris and Rujeko Hockley, ed., *We Wanted a Revolution: Black Radical Women 1965-85, A Sourcebook*, Brooklyn Museum, 2017, 244.

[158] Carol Hanisch credits Kathie Sarachild with suggesting the famous title for Hanisch's essay to editors Shulie Firestone and Anne Koedt of the 1970 anthology, *Notes from the Second Year: Women's Liberation*, see: http://www.carolhanisch.org/CHwritings/PIP.html and "Notes from the Second Year," *Duke University Libraries Repository Collections and Archives* website, https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/r33x35.

male producers from the mythically superior global north. Furthermore, the prioritization of Williams's biography by writers (with few exceptions) follows the tradition set by Giorgio Vasari in describing the early onset of Michelangelo's artistic abilities, as a child and before formal training as evidence of the artist's divinely administered genius.[159] Feminist art historians such as Linda Nochlin, Whitney Chadwick, Norma Broude, and Mary D. Garrard have mightily taught scholars to meet such tactics with deep suspicion.

Beginning the work of myth making in the 1937 "I Am a Negro" essay *for American* magazine, Williams demands to be considered an individual, writing "deal with me, and with the other men and women of my race, as individual problems, not as a race problem,"[160] foreclosing important understandings of the political trouble he engaged in. At the same time, the frustration that he makes palpable in the essay and other subsequent writings demonstrates a justified unease that his work – both in the built environment and in building equity and full citizenship for Black Americans – might be forgotten and eventually destroyed.

This chapter's examination of photographic representations of Williams at work will ask in the spirit of W. J. T. Mitchell's salient question, "What do pictures want?"[161] what photographs of Williams performing the work of an architect, Black man, professional, and citizen of Los Angeles are up to? My interest here is to move analysis away from questions concerning what the photographer may have intended to convey and thereby analyze what the photographs might

---

[159] See: Lina Nochlin, "Why Have There Been No Great Women Artists?" *Women, Art and Power and Other Essays*, (Pennsylvania: Harper Collins, 1988); Whitney Chadwick, *Women, Art, and Society*, Fifth ed. (London: Thames & Hudson, 2012) ; and Norma Broude, and Mary D. Garrard, *Reclaiming Female Agency: Feminist Art History After Postmodernism*, (University of California Press, 2005).

[160] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59.

[161] W. J. T. Mitchell, *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images* (University of Chicago Press, 2006).

mean, to instead think about what the photographs do, and how they collaborate with other media and operators to "work as a cultural practice."[162] Having argued in Chapter 1 that, like Frederick Douglass, Paul R. Williams argues his humanity and makes an appeal to viewers for their support of his claim of the status of full citizen of the United States, this chapter further contends that Williams's occupation photographs, when heard alongside his published essays and speeches, not only assert his professional standing but also strategically work to make Williams, the individual and Black citizen, visible. In doing so, Williams meaningfully troubles the white supremacy he resisted daily and fought to overcome.

When a viewer of Williams's occupation photographs understands the concurrent conditions of white supremacy and racial oppression in the United States in the 20th century, even at a superficial level, the photos pointedly illustrate the architect's negotiations with anti-Black racism and racial subordination. Williams actively discounts racist theorizing devaluing Black intellect, knowledge, and will in these photos providing a staunch visual example to denounce such incessant claims. However, Williams photographic appeals were no match to the persistent and vicious quality of anti-Black rhetoric and legislation at mid-century, along with wide-scale deployment vigilante violence against Black folks across the U.S. in the 20th century. Thus, with increasing urgency, especially after Williams's death in 1980, the appeals that Williams made within the civil space of photography are facilitated by mythic stories recounted and reshared by his granddaughter, and journalists. As described by art historian, Kristina Wilson,

---

[162] W. J. T. Mitchell, ed., *Landscape and Power* (1994), (University of Chicago Press, 2006), 1.

> Cultural studies theorist Stuart Hall argues that popular culture is an 'arena that is *profoundly* mythic . . . where we discover and play with the identifications of ourselves.' According to his model, popular culture is best understood not as a series of essentializing binaries, but rather as an expressive arena that has the capacity for a 'dialogic' relationship between image and reader."[163]

This posthumous work picked up and carried anew is enabled by the lines of *sight* that Williams established in his occupation photographs to strengthen the transmission of his appeal. After his death, these *sight lines* also fortify his legacy, offering tantalizing details and empathetic connection to Williams's struggle that continue to hold the capacity to reanimate and reenergize viewers born after Williams was actively producing work. Further, tracing the *sight lines* that operate in several occupation photographs of Williams made after WWII illuminates the architect's social justice work while decentering the "Architect to the Stars" narrative that popular media has often explored. I argue that considering Williams's work in this way reasserts the indispensable contributions of Black citizens towards holding onto the promises of democracy as idealized in the Declaration of Independence and the Constitution.

To further the consideration of myth as it operates in Williams's occupation photographs and writing, Williams's work will be placed in conversation with Hannah Arendt to examine the architect's practice of freedom and argue that by performing the work of a Black citizen and white-collar professional for photographs, Williams also worked against the erasure of his own subjectivity. The chapter will consider the inevitability of Black social death as argued by

[163] Kristina Wilson, *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 16.

Afropessimist theorists Frank Wilderson III with the aim of breaking open a possibility in which Williams can be seen and his appeal heard as a circumstance of having shaped his persona visually as both a locus and focal point for Black progress.

Sight Lines

In home designs featured in *The Small Home of Tomorrow* (1945) and *New Homes of Today* (1946), two books that Williams wrote immediately following WWII to address the pressing need for housing as soldiers returned from abroad and attempted to take advantage of the G.I. Bill to establish themselves as home owners, Williams often designed homes with open floor plans, moving living rooms and family activity spaces to the back of the structure away from the noise of the street and conceptually closer to the outside. Tellingly, in *The Small Home of Tomorrow*, Williams asserts that the modern home's

> broad sunlight [sic] windows, its close proximity to the outdoors and uncluttered interiors give one a new sense of freedom. Much of our living is now outdoors and we have moved to the rear of the house near the garden, the patio, or the terrace. The living room, dining room, and sometimes a bedroom all fitted with large windows are grouped around this outside area. This is the accepted floorplan of today . . ..”[164]

Although Williams cannot be credited with this approach, it has become characteristic of Californian residential design and continues to feature strongly in new architecture, especially

[164] Paul R. Williams, *The Small Home of Tomorrow* (Hollywood: Murray and Gee, 1945), 12, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89056201791&view=1up&seq=9.

the idea of attaching a patio structure to a rear entrance to provide a hybrid indoor/outdoor space that allows the house to "a dignified, almost formal face to the street . . . [that] opens up at the rear with wide glassed areas to offer informal living off the terrace"[165] suitable for lounging, dining, and even cooking. In *New Homes of Today*, Williams advises that "the room which opens onto the garden porch is now the heart of the social activity zone," rather than the "traditional living room"[166] with its default fireplace. The architect also encourages homeowners to "be sure that passageway is left thru the room so that one may move freely from one room to another" [167] when designing interior spaces. Here, Williams takes the supposed "clean" lines and unfussy minimalism of modern design to offer a sense of unobstructed space and fluid movement.

In his arrangement of the home, Williams drew the family together rather than distinguishing between separated work zones in the manner of homes built before WWII which typically walled-in the kitchen and other service areas like laundry and mud rooms to hide the presence of household servants, wives, and delivery personnel that worked in these spaces. Instead, the middle-class homes that Williams designed were punctuated with large picture windows, sliding glass doors, and rooms that took advantage of built in furnishings and technology that allowed rooms to be transformed from one purpose to another,[168] advising that new home builders plan for the inevitability of "future additions" so as to prevent "drastic and expensive alterations or

---

[165] Paul R. Williams, *The Small Home of Tomorrow* (Hollywood: Murray and Gee, 1945), 8, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89056201791&view=1up&seq=9.

[166] Paul R. Williams, *New Homes of Today* (Hollywood: Murray and Gee, 1946), 6, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015026796790&view=1up&seq=3.

[167] Paul R. Williams, *New Homes of Today* (Hollywood: Murray and Gee, 1946), 6, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015026796790&view=1up&seq=3.

[168] Paul R. Williams, *New Homes of Today* (Hollywood: Murray and Gee, 1946), 6, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015026796790&view=1up&seq=3.

unnatural changes to the original elevation."[169] As Kristina Wilson beautifully describes, "in the words and designs of African American architect Paul R. Williams, Modernism was positioned as a force that could gather together and protect the residents of a house."[170] Further, Wilson argues that Williams "proposes that Modernism might defend homeowners from external dangers, both environmental and social. He insinuates, further, that those living in such new houses have reason to fear threats from the outside, and that they merit Modernism's protection."[171]

As a result, Williams's design aesthetic incorporated clear *sight lines* from one space to another connecting residents and their guests with each other, even when they were involved in different activities. In the homes that Williams designed for average Americans, residents are enabled to see and speak to one another as they go about their domestic activities because the home itself has not sequestered specific bodies to certain rooms (though Williams does assume that the kitchen will be the domain of women),[172] nor insist that specific rooms beyond the bathroom need be entirely private spaces. In Williams's application of modern design theory, he reorganizes the lines between public and private space, and radically calls into question traditional distinctions that qualified the domestic as a space that contained and controlled activities involving survival. Importantly, I argue that Williams is interested in activating what Hannah Arendt termed a "space of appearance" within the home by conceiving of residential

[169] Paul R. Williams, *The Small Home of Tomorrow* (Hollywood: Murray and Gee, 1945), 9, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89056201791&view=1up&seq=9.

[170] Kristina Wilson, *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 18.

[171] Kristina Wilson, *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 55.

[172] Paul R. Williams, *New Homes of Today* (Hollywood: Murray and Gee, 1946), 6, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015026796790&view=1up&seq=3.

architecture as a place where freedom could be shaped and the homeowner might enjoy “the greatest adventure of all–a home of . . . [their] own, built to . . . [their] individual taste.”[173] Through the application of open sight lines and Williams’s collaborative approach to design, in the physical space of the home, a homeowner might also self-fashion on a localized, three-dimensional scale.

Taking a cue from the physical spaces that Williams designed, it is possible to also find Williams establishing *sight lines* in the two-dimensional photographs that he posed for after WWII. Like his residential designs, the *sight lines* that Williams establishes in photographs aim to draw viewer and subject together by cultivating the photograph as a public space in which to appear. Through the transformation that is set into motion with the use of sight lines, Williams strengthens the transmission of his political troubling to the photographic viewer while also extending his message into the future. Three occupation photographs of Williams will be used to demonstrate the *sight lines* Williams crafted between himself and other photographic subjects, as well as the photographic viewer.

First, a photograph by an unknown photographer depicting Williams standing with Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company executives Edgar Johnson, Norman Houston, and George Beavers taken in 1947 as the men review a model of the company building to be erected at 1999 West Adams Boulevard and the corner of South Western Avenue (Fig. 8). Williams characteristically uses a stylus to direct his client’s and the viewer’s attention to an ambiguous feature of the five-story late moderne building. In the photograph, the architect and his clients

[173] Paul R. Williams, *The Small Home of Tomorrow* (Hollywood: Murray and Gee, 1945), 9, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=wu.89056201791&view=1up&seq=9.

each cast downward gazes as they look at the model. The group looks pleased even while their poses convey the seriousness of their endeavor. The men stand over a table while a wood dividing wall – a kind of traditionally fashioned cubicle like divider with multiple panels and molded lines – foreshortens the view and presses them together. On this wall, floating above the men's work, is an apt image of a young Black boy and girl who appear to be holding books. The image functions as an illustrative base for a calendar. Metaphorically, the young people depicted stand as signifiers of the hope for a prosperous future for Black people.

A similarly minded image taken in 1952 by Julius Shulman, who specialized in photographs of modern architecture, depicts Williams standing in his new Los Angeles office at 3757 Wilshire Boulevard (Fig. 9). Dressed in a handsome suit, Williams stands next to an extensive bookcase with architectural, art history, and interior design books. The architect cradles an open book in his hands allowing a partial view of a round multi-story modernist building to be glimpsed. Shulman knelt near Williams's feet and took the photograph with the camera aimed upwards. As a result, Williams turns to the side, casting a downward gaze that meets the viewer's. The architect smiles conservatively, just as in the 1927 Ojai photograph (Fig. 1), but his pose no longer carries the hesitancy noted in the earlier photo. Rather, in the Shulman photo of Williams standing next to a bookcase, Williams moves with assuredness, and looks to the viewer authoritatively to communicate having established a place in the world.

Finally, a second image taken on the same day by Shulman in Williams's office depicts the architect sitting at a desk across from a presumed white male client[174] and an architectural model

[174] This man may be an employee of Williams's.

of a modern home complete with landscape design (Fig. 10). In this photo, Williams again gestures with a stylus towards an area of the proposed home at the side back with a raised covered porch while looking to his client with a friendly smile.

Several lines of *sight* function in these three photographs. In the Shulman portrait of Williams standing next to a bookcase, the architect looks beyond the frame to meet the viewer's gaze. There is a timeless quality to the image as Williams connects with future viewers. His posture, facial expression, and *sight line* indicate that he is interested in conveying a sense of himself as an individual, as well as his work, and he is surrounded by signifiers of that work in the volumes that are within his grasp. By holding a book in his hands, Williams conveys a sense of his hefty knowledge and experience in a gesture that puts his knowledge on display. Additionally, in Williams's gesture, the open book suggests that viewer and architect are engaged in a conversation and Williams is preparing to share examples in order to support a point or make a suggestion.

The staged conversation is more overtly on display in the Shulman photo of Williams with a white client. In the public space of the office, Williams and client are equals who engage in conversation, the architect meets his client eye to eye as they collaborate. Williams works to solve problems for the client and to build a space that meets the client's desires and needs. To do this work effectively, Williams must listen to the client's appeal, then translate what he hears into a complex plan for three-dimensional spaces. Because the viewer only sees the back of the client's head, the client lacks a degree of individuality. Strategically, this allows the viewer of the

image (who is also presumed to be white and male) to imagine themselves sitting in the same seat, as a client of Paul R. Williams.

The Shulman photograph of Williams with a client operates on a practical level to show the architect successfully overcoming racial bias and restrictions. Connotatively, Williams appeals to present and future viewers alike to convey that his work is not only difficult, but also worth documenting. As LeRonn P. Brooks, Associate Curator and leader of the African American Art History Initiative at the Getty Research Institute argues, given its public nature, architecture demands an active parlay with other people. "From his patrons to construction crews in the field, Williams had to establish both firm and dynamic relations to see his plans through."[175] In the Shulman photograph of Williams with a client, this typically unseen work is made literal.

Similarly, in the earlier occupation photograph of Williams with his Golden State Mutual clients, the unseen work of founding an insurance company that would serve Black Californians and work vehemently to defy racial covenants blocking Black home ownership is signified. Golden State Guarantee Fund Insurance Company, which would later be renamed Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company was founded in 1925 by William Nickerson Jr., with assistance from William O. Houston, and George A. Beavers Jr. Nickerson started the insurance company in a small office located on Central Avenue in downtown Los Angeles after relocating his family from Texas, possibly in response to a series of violent attacks against Black businesses and families across the United States, but specifically in Longview, Texas, from the 1910s into the

[175] Maristella Caciato and LeRonn P. Brooks, "The Architect Who Designed L.A. Landmarks While Fighting Segregation," *Getty*, July 21, 2021, https://www.getty.edu/news/the-architect-who-designed-la-landmarks-while-fighting-segregation/.

1920s.[176] Having arrived in Los Angeles, Nickerson "discovered that there was little or no insurance available for the then 16,000 black residents of Los Angeles."[177]

Early in his practice as an insurance salesman, Nickerson began the shrewd practice of studying the law, and was thusly able to avoid attorney's fees when incorporating.[178] Golden State Mutual experienced substantial growth, even during the Depression, eventually establishing offices in 22 states and the District of Columbia[179] and becoming the largest Black owned business west of the Mississippi.[180] Golden State Mutual, its founders, and many of the people associated with the business proved influential members of the Black community in Los Angeles.[181] The photograph marks a proud moment in the company's history as they expanded to a much larger headquarters and upended segregating insurance practices. In the photograph, the Black people of Los Angeles are seen.

---

[176] According to Trymaine Lee, "Armed white people stormed prosperous majority-black Wilmington, N.C., in 1898 to murder dozens of black people, force 2,000 others off their property and overthrow the city government. In the Red Summer of 1919, at least 240 black people were murdered across the country. And in 1921, in one of the bloodiest racial attacks in United States history, Greenwood, a prosperous black neighborhood in Tulsa, Okla., was burned and looted. It is estimated that as many as 300 black people were murdered and 10,000 were rendered homeless. Thirty-five square blocks were destroyed. No one was ever convicted in any of these acts of racist violence." Trymaine Lee, "A vast wealth gap, driven by segregation, redlining, evictions and exclusion separates black and white America," *New York Times*, August 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/racial-wealth-gap.html.

[177] Burt A. Folkart, "George Beavers, Jr.; Insurance Firm Founder," *Los Angeles Times* October 14, 1989, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-10-14-mn-101-story.html.

[178] Burt A. Folkart, "George Beavers, Jr.; Insurance Firm Founder," *Los Angeles Times* October 14, 1989, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-10-14-mn-101-story.html.

[179] Burt A. Folkart, "George Beavers, Jr.; Insurance Firm Founder," Los Angeles Times October 14, 1989, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-10-14-mn-101-story.html.

[180] Alex Poinsett, "Unsung Black Business Giants: Pioneer Entrepreneurs Laid Foundations for Today's Enterprises," *Ebony Magazine*, March 1990, n. 45, v. 5, 100, https://search-ebscohost-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=ear&AN=139798746&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[181] Nickerson's contributions to L.A. civic life, for example, were honored in the naming of the Nickerson Gardens housing complex that Paul R. Williams built.

Invisible Man

In 1901, California became one of the first states to enact licensure laws for architects which could be earned by passing a written exam after having worked three to five years in an architect's office.[182] To say that architecture was an exclusive field minimizes the incredible difficulty involved in gaining entry for Black professionals. As Williams's granddaughter Karen E. Hudson writes, "His obstacles were great, but nothing could extinguish his brilliance. Unable to participate in the 'old boys' network that boosted the careers of most architects of the day, he found ways to distinguish himself and garner clients."[183] Importantly, what Hudson stresses is that in the face of unrelenting racism and bias, her grandfather negotiated white supremacy deliberately. This work is evident in viewing the occupation portraits that Williams posed for, who like Frederick Douglass, was an *active* participant in the construction of his public persona.

As Wesley Howard Henderson details in his exceptional dissertation considering Williams and fellow Black architect, James H. Garrott, at the turn of the twentieth century, there were at least five avenues available for white men to follow in pursuit of a career in architecture. At the beginning of the 20th century, aspiring architects could be mentored by an established architect, earn a degree from an architectural or correspondence school, or develop design skills on-the-job while working as a builder, construction worker, or in a related field such as landscape design, furniture making, or tile making.[184] Williams resolutely accomplished requirements in each

[182] Wesley Howard Henderson, "Two Case Studies of African-American Architects' Careers in Los Angeles, 1890-1945: Paul R. Williams, FAIA and James H. Garrott, AIA" PhD diss., (University of California, Los Angeles, 1992), note 33, 23, http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/two-case-studies-african-american-architects/docview/303983391/se-2.

[183] Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams: Classic Hollywood Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 2021), 10.; and "2017 AIA Gold Medal: Paul Revere Williams, FAIA," *AIA*, https://www.aia.org/showcases/23066-paul-revere-williams-faia.

[184] Wesley Howard Henderson, "Two Case Studies of African-American Architects' Careers in Los Angeles, 1890-1945: Paul R. Williams, FAIA and James H. Garrott, AIA" PhD diss., (University of California, Los Angeles,

pathway. Williams's emphatic determination to learn how to be an architect follows the model set by W. E. B. Du Bois, who was a generation older. As Chad L. Williams writes in *The Wounded World: W. E. B. Du Bois and the First World War* (2023), "following the sudden death of his mother in March 1885, young Du Bois set out to make a name for himself and his family by obtaining the best education possible."[185] Du Bois attended and earned an undergraduate degree in three years from Fisk University, then a second B.A. from Harvard University in two years. While subsequently earning a doctorate in history from Harvard, Du Bois also spent two years at the University of Berlin. In their academic work alone, Du Bois and Williams testify to the adage that Black Americans must work twice as hard to get half as far as white Americans.

However, in this matrix, many Black architects were dismissed, their skills left unacknowledged, and their names left out of registries. As Henderson details, before the 1980s, architectural registries further obscured Black professionals by refusing and neglecting to collect racial and gender data.[186] In other words, the erasure of Black achievement and the invisibility of Black professionals was an important concern at midcentury, and Black intellectuals engaged in active criticism and debate to develop means of working against it.

1992), 25, http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/two-case-studies-african-american-architects/docview/303983391/se-2.

[185] Chad L. Williams, *Wounded World: W. E. B. Du Bois and the First World War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023), 12.

[186] Wesley Howard Henderson, "Two Case Studies of African-American Architects' Careers in Los Angeles, 1890-1945: Paul R. Williams, FAIA and James H. Garrott, AIA" PhD diss., (University of California, Los Angeles, 1992), 23, http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/two-case-studies-african-american-architects/docview/303983391/se-2.

The great novelist Ralph Ellison famously opens the Prologue to *Invisible Man*, with a declaration of self that eloquently reflects the strain and alienation weighing on Black American identity by mid-century:

> I am an invisible man. No I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen 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, simply because people refuse to see me.[187]

That *Invisible Man* was first published in 1952, the year that Shulman photographed Williams in his Los Angeles office shouldn't be dismissed as coincidence. Henderson writes extensively on the invisibility of Black architects for reasons relating to the multivalent entryways into the field and the professionalization of architecture at the turn of the 20th century in which the field of architecture worked to distinguish itself from trades such as building, carpentry, and masonry. Roberta Washington notes, "the struggle for social justice in architecture is painfully obvious"[188] when considering the history of public and social spaces such as restaurants, movie theatres, train stations, swimming pools, and parks. Add to this, Washington asserts,

> even one hundred years after the end of the Civil War, most Black Americans who wanted to become architects could only enroll in schools of architecture established at Black colleges and universities. In 1963 Harvey Gantt became the

[187] Ralph Ellison, "Prologue" in *Invisible Man*, (1952) Second Vintage International ed. (New York: Vintage, 1995), https://search-ebscohost-.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=721937&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

[188] Roberta Washington, "Designing for Social Justice," in *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America*, ed. Sean Anderson and Mabel O. Wilson (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2021), 53.

first architecture graduate from Clemson University in South Carolina–only after successfully suing the university to be admitted.[189]

Architecture remains an exclusionary field. According to the National Council of Architectural Registration Board's 2022 "By the Numbers" report, less than 2% of architects in the United States identify as Black even while the number of people of color entering architecture has increased. While Asian and Hispanic or Latino as well as women students and practitioners have increased, underrepresentation of Black architects in the field remains stagnant.[190]

As Chad L. Williams describes, Du Bois expresses a despair in 1952 similar to Ellison's invisible man when he reflected on the "enduring quest to reconcile the warring ideals of his Black identity and American identity."[191] After being aggressively investigated by the F.B.I. in response to his anti-war efforts following the eruption of WWII, accused of espionage in a sensational trial, and yet acquitted of those charges in 1951, Du Bois wrote,

> I have tried to make this nation a better country for my having lived in it. It would not be true for me to say that I 'love my country,' for it has enslaved, impoverished, murdered and insulted my people. Despite this I know what America has done for the poor, oppressed and hopeless of many other peoples, and what indeed it has done to contradict and atone for its sins against Negroes. I still believe that some day this nation will become a democracy without a color-

[189] Roberta Washington, "Designing for Social Justice," in *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America*, ed. Sean Anderson and Mabel O. Wilson (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2021), 53.

[190] National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, *NBTN 2022* "Demographics," https://www.ncarb.org/nbtn2022/demographics.

[191] Chad L. Williams, *Wounded World: W. E. B. Du Bois and the First World War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023), 419.

> line. I work and shall work for an America whose aim is not solely to make a few people rich, but rather to stop War, and abolish Poverty, Disease and Ignorance for all men.[192]

While Williams benefited from the growth of the movie, oil, and defense industries in Los Angeles,[193] as well as increased urban development in the region, which had itself been coaxed by waves of westward immigration, and the growth of military spending after WWII within a liberal culture more open to breaking social and class boundaries, he also faced a newly devised credentialing structure that relied almost completely upon professional recommendations and verbal agreements from wealthy white men. As esteemed modernist architect Richard Neutra exclaimed in 1925 after he and his family settled in Los Angeles, "I found what I had hoped for, a people who were more 'mentally footloose' than those elsewhere, who did not mind deviating opinions … [a place] where one can do almost anything that comes to mind and is good fun."[194] Williams similarly notes, "being a Californian was to my advantage. In California the people are interested in ideas that are new and fresh without the traditional ties that are ordinarily more associated with East Coast thinking."[195] A comparison between Neutra's, who was an Austrian born just a few years before Williams in 1892 to a wealthy Jewish family and became a U.S. citizen in 1929, and Williams's entry and recognition in the field of architecture would likely be a productive examination.

---

[192] W. E. B. Du Bois, *In Battle for Peace: The Story of My 83rd Birthday* quoted in Chad L. Williams, *Wounded World: W. E. B. Du Bois and the First World War* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023), 419.

[193] David Gebbard, "Paul R. Williams and the Los Angeles Scene," in Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 24.

[194] Virginia Postrel, "The Iconographer," *The Atlantic*, November 2006, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/11/the-iconographer/305288/.

[195] Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect*, New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 16.

To ensure that his credentials would never be doubted, Williams followed each avenue available to identify himself as an architect: he was mentored by architects, Wilbur D. Cook, Reginald Johnson, and John C. Austin learning advanced drafting techniques, landscape design, town planning, and public commissions as he worked; studied at the prestigious Los Angeles Polytechnic High School, the Los Angeles School of Art and Design and at the Los Angeles branch of the New York Beaux-Arts Institute of Design Atelier to hone his drawing skills, learn color theory and interior design, while also winning the Beaux Arts Medal for excellence in design;[196] and finally, he studied Architectural Engineering at the University of Southern California from 1916 to 1919.[197] Williams was certified as an architect in 1915, became a licensed architect in the state of California in 1921, and famously became the first Black member of the American Institute of Architects in 1923.[198]

Williams would go on to become a prolific practitioner specializing in revivalist homes for celebrities and other wealthy clients, working on more than 3,000 projects in his lifetime.[199] Though the stature of his clients casts a shadow on Williams's civic and civil work, his public and civic projects were among the work he was the proudest of. Importantly, Williams worked on the design teams for the first federally funded public housing project, Langston Terrace in Washington D.C. (1936), going on to design the Pueblo Del Rio housing project in southeast Los

[196] Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect*, New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 12.

[197] USC's program in architecture opened in 1914. David Gebbard writes that Williams was a student in the engineering program "but did not graduate" and Hudson notes that he was "one of eight students studying architectural engineering," Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 20 & 228. Williams writes in "If I Were Young Today," *Ebony*, August 1963, 56: "after three years at the university, I was forced to get a job." However, Elisa Huang writes that Williams was a "trailblazing alumnus" who graduated in 1919 in "The Legacy of Paul Revere Williams Lives on in L.A.," *in Trojan Family*, Autumn 2020, https://news.usc.edu/trojan-family/architect-paul-revere-williams-archive-usc-alumni-getty/.

[198] Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 228.

[199] Amy Hood, "The Legacy of Paul Revere Williams, The Getty Research Institute's *Iris Blog*, June 30, 2020, https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/the-legacy-of-paul-revere-williams/.

Angeles (1940), and the Nickerson Gardens housing project in Watts (1955). He designed large civic projects such as the Los Angeles Superior Court Stanley Mosk Courthouse (1958), as well as a new building for his lifelong church, Los Angeles's First A. M. E. (1968). He served on Los Angeles's first Housing Commission, the National Board of Municipal Housing, was President of the Los Angeles Municipal Art Commission, and offered adaptable plans for affordable middle-class home builders in his two publications from the 40s. As the founder of Johnson Publishing Company, John Johnson remarks, Williams "was very concerned with the problem of low-income housing, especially for African-Americans. He showed this by his tremendous commitment in writing and speaking about the issue. He was thinking about how you can build something for yourself with a small amount of money."[200] Fittingly, Williams was awarded the NAACP Spingarn Medal in 1953, become the AIA's first Black Fellow in 1957, and was posthumously honored as their first Black Gold Medalist in 2017.

And yet, almost invariably when Paul R. Williams is introduced, media follows his granddaughter Karen E. Hudson's lead by briefly describing the tragic circumstances of the architect's childhood and emphasizing several stories concerning the architect's professional practices that have become de rigueur. While it is often noted that Williams overcame significant racism, the personal details of those assaults and indignities are written about with reservation. This seems to be in keeping with the deference that Williams employed, exemplified in the "I Am a Negro essay" where he writes,

[200] Shashank Bengali, "Williams the Conqueror," *Trojan Family*, Spring 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20130527154825/http://www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/trojan_family/spring04/williams1.html.

> virtually everything pertaining to my professional life, during those early years, was influenced by my need to offset race prejudice, by my effort to force white people to consider me as an individual rather than as a member of a race. Occasionally, I encountered irreconcilables who simply refused to give me a hearing, but, on the whole, I have been treated with an amazing fairness. I have been rewarded on the just basis of my own ability-perhaps a bit more richly than my ability deserves, for it is an amusing irony that, with success, my color has a certain publicity value. I am a freak.[201]

Thinking of racism abstractly, Williams pauses to consider the irony of his own fame given the fact of his Blackness. While expressing the desire to be understood as an individual, he observes with a piercing tartness that his extraordinary accomplishments are nonetheless tainted with the grim bite of racism. In this cauldron, Williams notes reflectively that he is a "freak," communicating a persistent sense of being on the outside even after having supposedly broken through racial barriers. Interestingly, this acknowledgement of his unusualness can also be found in early modern works by women artists such as Judith Leyster. Like Leyster, Williams draws attention to the circumstance of his skills being deemed unexpected and exceptional to argue against this very condition and point to the absurdity of lack of opportunity for Black Americans. In other words, Williams seems to say that it should not be such surprise that a Black man can design beautiful homes and civic structures. Yet, as an individual who has attained success, Williams's exceptional skills and qualities as a Black individual are so unusual that he expresses the feeling of being less human. Wanting to decouple his work from his race seems to stem from the inability to wrest his selfhood from the mire of anti-Blackness.

---

[201] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937):, 162.

There is no doubt that Williams was not immune to racial hostilities. In "I Am a Negro," he writes frankly about having to switch to a Jim Crow car when traveling through southern states on his way to his office in Washington D.C. and back.[202] In a *Los Angeles Times* article written in anticipation of Hudson's first book on her grandfather, Ruth Ryon details that actress June Lockhart conveyed that Paul R. Williams and a colleague were denied service at a popular restaurant because Williams was Black.[203] Famously, Williams was not allowed to sit by the poolside nor stay for the night in the Beverly Hills Hotel as he designed its Crescent Wing, and remodeled its famed Polo Lounge and Fountain Coffee Room.[204] Williams was also prevented from occupying a building in Beverly Hills that he and another white architect had purchased jointly for their offices because of a racial covenant included in the deed.[205] Internalizing the oppression, he writes in "I Am a Negro,"

> If I could have the privilege of shouting in a voice that could be heard from border to border of this nation, I would cry: 'Negroes-WAKE UP! The emancipation which was given you was only an opportunity. Real emancipation lies in your own intellectual effort!' And I would also cry: 'White people-WAKE UP! A race is beginning to stir beneath your feet and to demand a place in the sun-*its* place, mind you, not yours!'[206]

[202] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59.

[203] Ruth Ryon, "Kin of Black Architect Gets More Data for Book," *Los* Angeles Times, Oct 1, 1989, http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/postscript-kin-black-architect-gets-more-data/docview/280794091/se-2.

[204] Royal Kennedy Rogers, *Hollywood's Architect: The Paul R. Williams Story*, directed and produced by Royal Kennedy Rodgers and Kathy McCampbell Vance, (February 6, 2020; Los Angeles: PBS So Cal), https://www.pbs.org/video/hollywoods-architect-3prwsa/.

[205] Ruth Ryon, "Kin of Black Architect Gets More Data for Book," *Los* Angeles Times, Oct 1, 1989, http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/postscript-kin-black-architect-gets-more-data/docview/280794091/se-2.

[206] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 163.

Rather than rail against specific indignities, four stories are activated to summarize Williams's labor against racism. First, that upon sharing his interest in becoming an architect Williams was met with "blank discouragement"[207] by an instructor[208] who advised the promising student to consider studying medicine or law instead. Secondly, and most famously, that Williams learned to draw upside down to prevent the discomfort of white clients at having a Black man sit next to or stand over them. Third, that he developed the practice of keeping his hands clasped behind his back while on job sites to circumvent the expectation that colleagues, or clients needed to shake his hand. And finally, when unknowing white realized that Williams was Black after arriving at his office, then awkwardly attempt to excuse themselves, the architect would appeal to the client's sense of worth by first informing them that he did not typically take up projects that were less than a specific value (inferring that their project had too low a budget for his expertise), but that if the client was willing to sit down, he would happily offer them free advice.

Williams wrote of this work:

> Theatrical tactics? Of course-but I had to win a hearing, a chance to present my wares and prove my ability. And I knew that nothing so impresses the average American as the illusion of financial success, especially if that success is encountered in an unexpected quarter. The trick worked. Frequently it gave me needed clients.[209]

---

[207] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 161.
[208] See note 134.
[209] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 161.

Williams's strategic negotiations amount to a radical self-fashioning in the spirit of Frederick Douglass's willful act of posing for photographs as he also fashioned himself an exemplary American. Thus, when Williams considers the anti-Blackness he must carefully negotiate in order to succeed as an architect, his thoughts lead to a liberal/conservative bifurcation which he expresses in "I Am a Negro" after questioning his place as a citizen:

> The true and complete answer is lost somewhere in a vague jumble of emotional theories and practical considerations which constitute the 'race problem.' On the one hand, the professed humanitarian delivers eloquent harangues about the 'black brother' and talks of freedom and equality and universal love. On the other hand, the confirmed exponent of racial hatred and intolerance rises to dramatic heights in predicting dire catastrophe as the certain result of permitting a debased black population to flourish and multiply beside the white citizenry of America. Both are extremists, both are emotionally intoxicated, both fail to grasp today's fundamental facts. On the left are the disciples of sociology and biology, who prophesy that at some future stage in man's evolution all races-white, black, yellow, brown, and red-will be fused into a single, great, human race. On the right are the reactionaries who would damn a race today and through all of tomorrows to come because it lived in savagery yesterday. The one looks to a remote future, the other to the dead past. Both are inclined to overlook the practical problems of the immediate now.[210]

It's important to recognize the tension that exists in Williams's lore as though certain biographic details must be repeated in perpetuity lest these facts evaporate. For example, it appears always

[210] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59.

important to know that Williams found it necessary to engage in "tricks"[211] and "ruses"[212] to gain the trust of white clients. While this chapter does not necessarily intend to work against this goal, it is interested in looking at the labor of such an endeavor to understand Williams's current standing as a Black leader, the question of his notoriety as a well-known architect, and to question what peripheral objectives a heroic vision of Williams might serve?

Consider for example an excerpt from an NPR piece in which Williams's granddaughter is interviewed and relays the now essential lore:

> Sitting in the 1951 home Williams designed for himself, his granddaughter says her grandfather made many pragmatic adjustments to the reality of racism in his day. 'He taught himself to draw upside down so white clients wouldn't be uncomfortable sitting next to him.' And, Hudson says with a smile, 'it became one of the things he was known for.' Williams toured construction sites with hands clasped behind his back, like an English royal, because he wasn't sure every person would want to shake a black man's hand. So he gave them the option of extending their hand first.[213]

Having characterized Williams's amiability, Hudson then adds grist by recounting that, "Many of the neighborhoods in which his homes were located were closed to him because of his race."[214]

[211] Williams uses this term several times in the essay.

[212] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 162.

[213] Karen Grisby Bates and Melissa Block, "A Trailblazing Black Architect Who Helped Shape L.A.," All Things Considered, *NPR*, June 22, 2012, https://www.npr.org/2012/06/22/155442524/a-trailblazing-black-architect-who-helped-shape-l-a (accessed September 23, 2022).

[214] Karen Grisby Bates and Melissa Block, "A Trailblazing Black Architect Who Helped Shape L.A.," All Things Considered, *NPR*, June 22, 2012, https://www.npr.org/2012/06/22/155442524/a-trailblazing-black-architect-who-helped-shape-l-a (accessed September 23, 2022).

This is a gripe that Williams uses to open the “I Am a Negro” essay, explaining:

> Today I sketched the preliminary plans for a large country house which will be erected in one of the most beautiful residential districts in the world, a district of roomy estates, entrancing vistas, and stately mansions. Sometimes I have dreamed of living there. I could afford such a home. But this evening, leaving my office, I returned to my own small, inexpensive home in an unrestricted, comparatively undesirable section of Los Angeles. Dreams cannot alter facts; I know that, for the preservation of my own happiness, I must always live in that locality, or in another like it, because . . . I Am a Negro.[215] (ellipsis in original text)

Nevertheless, the bitter situation was a generative sticking point for Williams – he was eventually able to build a home in 1951 in the Lafayette Square neighborhood of West Central Los Angeles “on one of the few vacant plots remaining” as the neighborhood’s “fashionableness for . . . white upper middle class [owners] diminished . . . and a small contingent of middle- and upper-middle-class blacks began to acquire houses in the area in the late forties and early fifties.”[216] The home, located at 1690 S. Victoria Avenue remains defiant in its streamlined modernism as it stands in a neighborhood that is filled with traditional and revivalist styles (Fig. 11).[217]

The *Los Angeles Times*, Black magazines, and design publications such as *Architectural Digest* charted Williams’s career with hundreds of articles. At the time of this writing, over 120 articles

---

[215] Paul Williams, “I Am a Negro,” *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937), 59.

[216] David Gebbard, “Paul R. Williams and the Los Angeles Scene,” in Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 26.

[217] Christopher Hawthorne, “I told my mother-in-law I’d plan an L.A. architecture tour for her 80th birthday. But what buildings to choose?” *Los Angeles Times*, November 24, 2017, https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/la-ca-cm-building-type-architecture-tour-20171126-htmlstory.html.

can be found just on the *L.A. Times*'s "Historical" database of articles from 1881 to 1992 by searching "Paul R. Williams" plus architect, and an additional 14 articles can be found in the "Current" *L.A. Times* database of articles from 1985 to the present. Before the architect's death, many of the headlines point out that Williams was Black, but also mark achievements involving architectural competitions, appointments, public and private commissions, as well as when he was the recipient of an award. For example, an article entitled "Famed Architect Defied Color Line: Paul R. Williams, One of Busiest Wartime Designers, Shocked Clients into Recognizing Ability"[218] from a 1943 edition of the *Pittsburgh Herald* makes note of Williams's race while praising him for overcoming racial barriers, albeit by "shocking" presumably white clients not with the quality of his work, but through a "trick" that would jar them out of their racism. Similarly, a 1946 *Ebony* magazine article featuring a view of the architect at a drawing desk with countless rolls of blueprints behind him calls Williams an "Ace Architect" and emphasizes American ideological qualities apparent in Williams's demeanor and work ethic that have "in a luxury field where prejudice is at its peak, [allowed] the ambitious, aloof architect for Hollywood movie celebrities … [to have] cracked all color barriers through sheer talent, sweat and will power."[219] While, matter-of-factly, Williams's obituary in the *L.A. Times* broadcasts that an "Early American Black Architect, 85, Dead: Designed Some of Southland's Most Famous Landmarks."[220]

---

[218] "Famed Architect Defied Color Line: Paul R. Williams, One of Busiest Wartime Designers, Shocked Clients into Recognizing Ability," *The Pittsburgh* Courier, December 4, 1943. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/famed-architect-defied-color-line/docview/202129068/se-2 (accessed December 5, 2022).

[219] "Designer For Living: America's Ace Architect Paul Williams Attains Fame and Fortune Blueprinting Stately Mansions," *Ebony Magazine Archive*, February 1, 19461, 24–29. https://search-ebscohost-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=ear&AN=138721470&site=ehost-live&scope=site (accessed December 5, 2022).

[220] Stanley O. Willford, "Early American Black Architect, 85, Dead: Designed Some of Southland's Most Famous Landmarks," *Los Angeles Times*, January 28, 1980.

However, beginning in the 1990s, roughly a decade after Williams's death and 25 years after he retired from his practice, media publications began to describe Paul R. Williams as "unknown" and "forgotten." An article written in 1989 by Ruth Ryon, who frequently reported on Williams's career for the *L.A. Times*, may be the earliest to describe Williams in this way with the title, "A forgotten black architect who designed mansions for movie stars." The effect is enticing and supported by the architect's granddaughter, who is described as being "on a mission," declaring in the article that "I am trying to have him remembered."[221] Into the 21st century, magazine and newspaper articles, blogs, television, and radio programs routinely announce their concern for Williams's legacy in titles such as: "A Forgotten Black Architect Who Designed Mansions for Movie Stars,"[222] "The Overlooked Legacy of American Architect Paul Revere Williams,"[223] and "Paul Revere Williams: From the Center to the Margins and Back Again."[224] A blog page dedicated to Williams on the Parisi Group of Real Estate agent's website describes Williams's obituary as "modest" in part because it "ran on page 22," explaining:

> In the immediate wake of Williams' death, no glossy books of his work were published, much less a catalogue raisonné. Buildings he designed were torn down; others, remodeled beyond recognition. The work of an architect whose firm was

---

http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/early-american-black-architect-85-dead/docview/162581870/se-2 (accessed December 5, 2022).

[221] Ruth Ryon, "A forgotten black architect who designed mansions for movie stars," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1989. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/forgotten-black-architect-who-designed-mansions/docview/280848865/se-2 (accessed November 15, 2022).

[222] Ruth Ryon, "A forgotten black architect who designed mansions for movie stars," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1989. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/forgotten-black-architect-who-designed-mansions/docview/280848865/se-2 (accessed November 15, 2022).

[223] Diana Budds, "The Overlooked Legacy of American Architect Paul Revere Williams," *The Weekly Challenger*, December 15, 2016, http://theweeklychallenger.com/the-overlooked-legacy-of-pioneering-african-american-architect-paul-revere-williams/ (accessed November 15, 2022).

[224] Christopher Hawthorne, "Paul Revere Williams: From the Center to the Margins and Back Again," *Architect*, April 17, 2017, https://www.architectmagazine.com/awards/aia-awards/paul-revere-williams-from-the-center-to-the-margins-and-back-again_o (accessed November 30, 2022).

> responsible for thousands of structures in Southern California, who was name-checked in real estate ads as 'world-famous,' who shaped L.A. through civic roles including a seat on the City Planning Commission — a position he assumed in 1921 at the tender age of 27 — was in danger of fading away. How times have changed.[225]

The blog cuts quick to the chase concerning the stakes – because Williams's buildings were undervalued conceptually and monetarily, they were being torn down or significantly altered. The unidentified blog writer's interest in this cause is also clear given that the agents associated with Parisi Group and Compass brokerage might directly profit from the sale of Williams's properties. As well, it is important to recognize that language in the blog is paraphrased from an *L.A. Times* article written by Carolina Miranda that utilizes Hudson and Williams's "I Am a Negro" essay as sources.[226] Williams's essay reverberates in his granddaughter's recounting of his career and is appropriated by commercial interests to increase interest in his properties.

The photo of Williams used by *Ebony* in 1963 (Fig. 2) was taken by Black photographer Howard Morehead, who was himself a forerunner who "broke the color barrier."[227] After serving in WWII as a Tuskegee Airman, Morehead moved to Los Angeles and studied photography at Los Angeles City College and motion picture photography at USC.[228] In the 1950s, he worked as a

---

[225] The Parisi Group and Compass Real Estate Brokerage, "Paul R. Williams Wasn't Just 'architect to the Stars,' He Shaped Los Angeles," Hollywood Hills.com Blog, January 18, 2021, https://hollywoodhills.com/blog/paul-r-williams-wasnt-just-architect-to-the-stars-he-shaped-los-angeles (accessed December 6, 2022).

[226] See Carolina A. Miranda, "Architect Paul William's archive, thought lost to fire, is safe. The Getty and USC will acquire it," *Los Angeles Times* (June 30, 2020) https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-06-30/architect-paul-williams-archive-was-thought-lost-in-a-fire-it (accessed September 23, 2022).

[227] Myrna Oliver, "Howard Morehead, 79; Photographer of Jazz Musicians Broke Color Barrier," *Los Angeles Times*, July 24, 2003, https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-jul-24-me-morehead24-story.html.

[228] Myrna Oliver, "Howard Morehead – pioneering black photographer," *SFGATE*, June 25, 2003, https://www.sfgate.com/bayarea/article/Howard-Morehead-pioneering-black-photographer-2563885.php.

news photographer for Black newspaper the *Los Angeles Sentinel*, later becoming the first West Coast staff photographer for Johnson Publications as well as the first Black staff cameraman for Los Angeles television station, KTLA-TV Channel 5, and later KNBC-TV Channel 7. Additionally, to combat racism in the beauty pageant circuit, Morehead founded the Miss Bronze California beauty pageant.[229]

Ebony magazine was founded in 1945 by John H. Johnson and published by the Johnson Publishing Company. After Johnson's death in 2005, struggling for viability as subscriptions for paper media plummeted, and digital news searched to find its sea legs, Johnson Publishing Company had few other options but to use their archive of more than 4 million images documenting 70 years of Black American life and 5,2000 individual publications[230] as collateral for a $12 million loan from Capital V Holdings, which is owned by filmmaker George Lucas and his wife, Mellody Hobson.[231] In advance of Johnson Publishing's filing for bankruptcy in 2019,[232] Capital V Holdings petitioned the courts for permission to sell the archive at auction. The archive was purchased for $30 million[233] by a consortium led by The Getty, and comprised of the Ford Foundation, Mellon Foundation, MacArthur Foundation, and The Smithsonian

[229] Doug Johnson, "Finding Aid for the Howard Morehead photographs and papers," *Online Archive of California*, last updated February 2, 2017, https://oac.cdlib.org/findaid/ark:/13030/kt5g5032wd/entire_text/.

[230] Anya Ventura, "Inside the Johnson Publishing Company Archive," *Getty Magazine* (Spring 2022), 26, https://www.getty.edu/about/whatwedo/getty_magazine/gettymag_spring2022.pdf (accessed November 30, 2022).

[231] Robert Channick, "Ebony photo archives sold for $30M, with plan to donate collection to Smithsonian and other museums to ensure public access" *Chicago Tribune*, July 25, 2019, https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-getty-buys-ebony-photo-archives-auction-20190725-apybak65fjb6ldycv7y2wsshru-story.html (accessed November 30, 2022).

[232] Anya Ventura, "Inside the Johnson Publishing Company Archive," *Getty*, February 17, 2022, https://www.getty.edu/news/inside-the-johnson-publishing-company-archive/ (accessed November 30, 2022).

[233] Robert Channick, "Ebony photo archives sold for $30M, with plan to donate collection to Smithsonian and other museums to ensure public access," *Chicago Tribune* (July 25, 2019), https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-getty-buys-ebony-photo-archives-auction-20190725-apybak65fjb6ldycv7y2wsshru-story.html (accessed November 30, 2022).

Museum of African American History,[234] that worked to make the purchase in recognition of the importance of the collection to Black American history. “There is no greater repository of the history of the modern African-American experience than this archive,” James Cuno, president of The J. Paul Getty Trust, said in the news release announcing the sale.[235] “Saving it and making it available to the public is a great honor and a grave responsibility.”[236] Painfully, the sale secured more than 100% return on Lucas’s and Hobson’s investment, but also resulted in making the archive publicly available by dispersing it to institutions such as the Getty Research Institute and the Smithsonian National Museum of African American History and Culture.

Given the expressed importance of publications such as *Ebony* magazine and the Johnson Publishing Company’s archive, its demise is heart wrenching even though numerous other print publications have suffered a similar fate. That such a stalwart publisher of the Black experience could falter serves as testimony to the anxieties that the Williams family and admirers of the architect’s work might justifiably hold. The fate of the Johnson Publishing Company and their archive also offers a pointed example of the vulnerability of records of Black achievement and Black life. It was no small concern for Frederick Douglass, nor to Paul R. Williams, to consider how easily their life achievements could/would be erased.

[234] Anya Ventura, “Inside the Johnson Publishing Company Archive,” *Getty*, February 17, 2022, https://www.getty.edu/news/inside-the-johnson-publishing-company-archive/.

[235] Associated Press, “Ebony and Jet magazines’ photo archive will go to Smithsonian,” *NBC News* (Los Angles, CA) July 26, 2019, https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/ebony-jet-magazines-photo-archive-will-go-smithsonian-n1034851.

[236] Robert Channick, “Ebony photo archives sold for $30M, with plan to donate collection to Smithsonian and other museums to ensure public access,” *Chicago Tribune* (July 25, 2019), https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-getty-buys-ebony-photo-archives-auction-20190725-apybak65fjb6ldycv7y2wsshru-story.html.

Likewise, the mounting worry of Williams's invisibility coincides with several important events. First, the sequential raising of Williams's buildings such as the Cord residence in 1963,[237] the original St. Jude's Children's Research Hospital in Memphis, Tennessee in 1992,[238] Perino's restaurant in 2005, and the Ambassador Hotel in 2005-2006,[239] among others, sounded the alarm to the Williams family as well as preservationists in Los Angeles that the architect's work was being lost. As Williams's work came under threat, civil unrest in South Central Los Angeles after the Rodney King verdict in 1992, where Williams was an active member of the business community, led to the destruction of the Broadway Savings and Loan building at Broadway and 45th Street in Los Angeles, that Williams had renovated from a former Woolworth's store.[240]

Leading up to the publication of Hudson's first book on her grandfather, she too bemoaned the lack of scholarship on Williams, stating, "There never was a book about him, and he is often not mentioned in books about Los Angeles architecture."[241] Realizing at his funeral in 1980 that her

---

[237] "E.L. Cord Residence, Beverly Hills," *Paul Revere Williams Project*, https://www.paulrwilliamsproject.org/index.html.1.40.html.

[238] Williams designed the hospital pro bono for his friend, the hospital's founder, Danny Thomas. In 1972, Williams attended a ten-year anniversary celebration, which was held at the Peabody Hotel, where his birth father worked as a waiter before moving to California. See: Shashank Bengali, "Williams the Conqueror," *Trojan Family*, Spring 2004, https://web.archive.org/web/20130527154825/http://www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/trojan_family/spring04/williams1.html.

[239] "Ambassador Hotel (demolished), Los Angeles Conservancy, https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/ambassador-hotel-demolished.

[240] Williams's Golden State Mutual Life Insurance Company building, which stands on the corner of Adams Boulevard and Western Avenue, was also threatened in the turmoil. Both Broadway Savings and Loan (which was built by James H. Garrott) and Golden State Mutual Life Insurance were founded by Black leaders in resistance to racist laws and policies that prevented Black folks from buying homes, investing their wealth, and securing their wealth for their chosen beneficiaries. Broadway Savings and Loan was the first federally secured Black savings and loan west of the Mississippi. Williams sat on the board of the Broadway Federal Savings and Loan, and his son-in-law, Hadley Meares, "The Pride of West Adams," *Curbed Los Angeles*, February 18, 2020 https://la.curbed.com/2020/2/18/21138451/golden-state-mutual-life-insurance-building-los-angeles; and Karen E. Hudson's grandfather on her father's side is Henry Claude Hudson, who was a founder and Chairman of Broadway Savings and Loan.

[241] Ruth Ryon, "A forgotten black architect who designed mansions for movie stars," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1989. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/forgotten-black-architect-who-designed-mansions/docview/280848865/se-2.

maternal grandfather[242] was a notable Angelino, she reportedly searched libraries for information on his career to no avail only to later discover that her grandmother, Della Mae Williams's collection of clippings, personal notes, and other memorabilia constituted the most extensive record of Williams's work.[243] In her search, Hudson was unable to find a complete list of Williams's building projects, and reportedly numbered his total output at about a thousand projects,[244] eventually identifying several thousand more homes after numerous former clients, employees, and current owners of Paul R. Williams's works contacted her in response to a call published in the *L.A. Times* requesting information on her grandfather's career.[245] A seemingly insignificant matter, this detail is curious as the architect's obituary published in the same newspaper acknowledges that Williams designed nearly 3,000 homes and mentions Williams's work on the Beverly Hills Saks Fifth Avenue location, the Palm Springs Tennis Club, and a hotel in Medellin, Colombia.[246] I draw attention to this matter not to criticize Hudson's memory but to point out an exemplary inconsistency that suggests myth building at work.

---

[242] Karen Hudson's paternal grandfather, Henry Claude Hudson was a well-known civil rights activist, dentist, and lawyer who was active in the Niagra Movement, served as President of the Los Angeles chapter of the NAACP, and was a friend of Paul R. Williams. Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect*, New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 40.

[243] Bettijane Levine, "A Legacy Restored; Undaunted by Racism, Architect Paul R. Williams Left a Lasting Mark on L.A. but Few Knew His Name . . . Until a Granddaughter Understood Her Important Heritage" *Los Angeles Times,* Aug 08, 1999. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/family-album-weekly-profile-history-joys-trials/docview/421557864/se-2.

[244] Ruth Ryon, "Kin of black architect gets more data for book," *Los Angeles Times* (October 1, 1989), http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/postscript-kin-black-architect-gets-more-data/docview/280794091/se-2.

[245] Ruth Ryon, "A forgotten black architect who designed mansions for movie stars," *Los Angeles Times*, July 23, 1989. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/forgotten-black-architect-who-designed-mansions/docview/280848865/se-2.

[246] Stanley O Williford, "Early American Black Architect, 85, Dead: Designed some of Southland's most Famous Landmarks," *Los Angeles Times* (January 28, 1980), http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/early-american-black-architect-85-dead/docview/162581870/se-2.

In some contradiction, the Art Museum of the University of Memphis's *Paul Revere Williams Project* testifies to Williams's influence and notoriety in the introduction to their incredibly useful annotated bibliography on Williams stating,

> beginning in the 1920s and continuing through most of the century, Paul R. Williams was viewed by his peers as a master of the affordable, small house for a growing American middle class and the large, historic revival residence for the affluent. Photographic essays featuring his work on these two distinct types of architecture appeared in major professional and design magazines. His opinions on design were sought and widely reported. His influence on American aesthetics extended well beyond California.[247]

The project identified and verified over 2200 sources of information on Williams, his building projects, the historical context in which Williams worked, and the circumstances of Black architects in the modern period. Curiously, though, the project laments a "lack of scholarship on Williams" noting that while thousands of articles were written about the architect and his career, "architectural historians have given Williams' work only glancing attention," further claiming that "after his death in 1980, Paul R. Williams quickly fell from public notice."[248] To their point, as of this writing, Wesley Howard Henderson's 1992 UCLA dissertation, "Two case studies of African-American architects' careers in Los Angeles, 1890-1945: Paul R. Williams, FAIA and

---

[247] Katherine Broome, "Annotated Bibliography," *Paul Revere Williams Project*, ed. and compiled by Deborah W. Brackstone, (Tennessee: Art Museum of the University of Memphis, 2015), https://www.paulrwilliamsproject.org/Paul%20R%20Williams%20Project%20An%20Annotated%20Bibliography.pdf.

[248] Katherine Broome, Annotated Bibliography, Paul Revere Williams Project, ed. and compiled by Deborah W. Brackstone, (Tennessee: Art Museum of the University of Memphis, 2015), (accessed November 30, 2022), https://www.paulrwilliamsproject.org/Paul%20R%20Williams%20Project%20An%20Annotated%20Bibliography.pdf.

James H. Garrott, AIA"[249] is the only entry that appears in a search for "Paul R. Williams" as a subject for a dissertation in the *ProQuest Dissertations and Theses Global* database. This dissertation will join Henderson's intending to expand consideration of how Williams worked to ensure his work was remembered even as I cast a somewhat skeptical eye at the characterization of his work being forgotten.

Hudson became the custodian of Williams's archive after his death, organizing and maintaining numerous renderings, blueprints, receipts, photographs, notebooks, and correspondences, while also courting institutions as potential recipients of the collection. As Bettijane Levine reported in 1999, Hudson "spends much of her time these days speaking about Williams and his work, debating where to donate his collected papers and plans, and deciding (with advice from her brother) how to further memorialize the career of a man who gave so much to Los Angeles."[250] Using this information along with interviews conducted in response to her call for information in the *L.A. Times*, Hudson has published three books on her grandfather's career: *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (1993), *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect* (1994) and *Paul R. Williams: Classic Hollywood Style* (2021), all published by Rizzoli. These texts remain essential materials to studies on Paul R. Williams even though they take up far less space than the volumes dedicated to his white contemporary, Frank Lloyd Wright which typically sit next to Williams's on the library shelf. Nonetheless, although the books provide information

[249] Wesley Howard Henderson, "Two Case Studies of African-American Architects' Careers in Los Angeles, 1890-1945: Paul R. Williams, FAIA and James H. Garrott, AIA" PhD diss., (University of California, Los Angeles, 1992), 25, http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/two-case-studies-african-american-architects/docview/303983391/se-2.

[250] Bettijane Levine, "A Legacy Restored; Undaunted by Racism, Architect Paul R. Williams Left a Lasting Mark on L.A. but Few Knew His Name . . . Until a Granddaughter Understood Her Important Heritage" *Los Angeles Times,* Aug 08, 1999. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/family-album-weekly-profile-history-joys-trials/docview/421557864/se-2.

from Williams's own notes and unpublished autobiography, because they are written for everyday audiences Hudson's books on her grandfather do not participate in the scholarly examinations that *The Paul Revere Williams Project* astutely recognizes as lacking and that might venture away from his biography in important ways.

To refine the issue, Hudson, journalists, and *The Paul Revere Williams Project* have called upon academics to not only include Williams into the canon, but to see Williams's work by understanding the significance of his architectural contributions in shaping Los Angeles while self-fashioning himself as a model from which other Black architects might build their own practices. As Hudson recounts in an interview with NPR, Williams "believed that for every home and every commercial building that [he designed but] he could not buy and that he could not live in, he was opening doors for the next generation."[251] Similarly, LeRonn P. Brooks asserts,

> he would have gone into majority white spaces knowing he wasn't just doing it for himself. I think he would understand that he was absolutely a civil rights figure, and that with every project he himself was a bridge between communities. Every accomplishment provided a kind of prideful reflection on his community—it wasn't just for him. It is astounding to imagine the weight on his shoulders, but it's also invigorating to know that he lived up to the challenge and excelled.[252]

[251] Karen Grisby Bates and Melissa Block, "A Trailblazing Black Architect Who Helped Shape L.A.," All Things Considered, *NPR*, June 22, 2012, https://www.npr.org/2012/06/22/155442524/a-trailblazing-black-architect-who-helped-shape-l-a.

[252] Maristella Caciato and LeRonn P. Brooks, "The Architect Who Designed L.A. Landmarks While Fighting Segregation," *The Getty*, July 21, 2021, https://www.getty.edu/news/the-architect-who-designed-la-landmarks-while-fighting-segregation/.

Key to this work is the Paul R. Williams archive. After the 1992 uprising, it was widely reported that Williams's papers had been lost when the Broadway Federal Savings & Loan building burned. However, in 2020 Williams's granddaughter revealed that most of what had been lost in the fire amounted to business receipts, and that she had maintained Williams's plans, blueprints, renderings, and correspondence elsewhere.[253] Comprising approximately 35,000 plans, 10,000 original drawings, blueprints, photographs, correspondence, and other materials, Hudson donated her grandfather's archive jointly to the Getty Research Institute and his alma mater, USC.[254] As LeRonn P. Brooks argues, "Williams's archive will no doubt help us have a more in-depth understanding of the vast amount of work he's done, and how important he was, and is, to American architecture. Williams is pretty much at the root of the tree of African American architects."[255] Once these documents are made available to scholars, a fuller representation of Williams's outlook might be gleaned.

That noted, articles written by Ruth Ryon articulate an erasure that seems to have been expected ahead of compelling evidence. Ryon declares that Williams was an unknown architect even while he was noted in Black newspapers as a community leader, and claims that his buildings were not valued as much as they should be, even though they were built in some of the state's most expensive neighborhoods. Ryon's gestures suggest that because Williams was Black, he would without a doubt be forgotten and his contributions to Los Angeles devalued and erased.

---

[253] The Parisi Group and Compass Real Estate Brokerage, "Paul R. Williams Wasn't Just 'architect to the Stars,' He Shaped Los Angeles," Hollywood Hills.com (blog), January 18, 2021, https://hollywoodhills.com/blog/paul-r-williams-wasnt-just-architect-to-the-stars-he-shaped-los-angeles.

[254] Carolina A. Miranda, "Architect Paul William's archive, thought lost to fire, is safe. The Getty and USC will acquire it," *Los Angeles Times* (June 30, 2020) https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-06-30/architect-paul-williams-archive-was-thought-lost-in-a-fire-it.

[255] Erin Migdol, Getty Research Institute, "Staff Profile," *Getty Magazine*, Spring 2022, 8-9. And "Protecting a Legacy of African American Art," May 17, 2022, https://www.getty.edu/news/leronn-brooks-profile-african-american-art-history-initiative/.

This presumption offers a compelling storyline at a moment of significant crisis that other media appears to have joined, at least in part, to tell the story of a Black man in Los Angeles that does not conform to prevalent stereotypes. Although Williams was orphaned before he entered school, he did not fall into poverty, but was nurtured by his community. Although he was discouraged from becoming a white-collar professional, he managed to circumvent traps that prevented many women and other people of color from identifying themselves as "architects." Although he was blocked from living and working in spaces of his own choosing, Williams was nevertheless successful in his career, ascending class to live a life with comforts that few other Black Angelinos could claim.

The Space of Appearance

Something else is going on in the Shulman photo of Williams with a white client (Fig. 10) that can be seen when compared to the photograph taken in 1947 with the Golden State Mutual Executives (Fig. 8). In each photo, Williams performs the work of the architect. He is watched inside the photo at the time of its making by the photographer and his clients. He is still being seen today when the photographs are used to discuss his work and archive. In both photos, Williams joins in debate with his fellow citizens. To be sure, the Shulman image suggests some reticence, whereas the image of Williams with Golden State Mutual Executives feels slightly more convivial. Nevertheless, the literal work that Williams demonstrates in these photographs is speech and persuasion. The architect points out, shows, and explains why certain design decisions were made to convince clients that the designs meet their needs. Williams also communicates having heard his clients as they conveyed their ideas and demonstrates that he has

listened as he moves around the model pointing to relevant elements of the design. Williams writes about his strategic conversations in “I Am a Negro” explaining,

> I spent hours learning to draw upside-down. Then, with a prospective client seated across the desk from me, I would rapidly begin to sketch the living room of his house. Invariably, his interest would be excited by the trick. But it was more than a trick, for, as the room developed before his eyes, I would ask for suggestions and for approval of my own ideas. He became a full partner in the birth of that room as I filled in the details of the drawing.”[256]

Again, what Williams fosters is an environment where client and architect work as equals towards the solution to a set of problems. The Shulman photograph alludes to the architect’s “trick” of drawing upside down but does not illustrate Williams’s turmoil. However, when read with Williams’s “I Am a Negro” essay, the photograph facilitates a mental image of the architect engaged in his signature “trick.”. The sight lines that are established by the photographs lead the viewer to understand Williams’s success.

I argue that the *polis* is being activated in these photos – that site in the ancient Greek world that Hannah Arendt describes as the realm in which citizens meet as equals. As Arendt explains,

> to belong to the few ‘equals’ (*homoioi*) meant to be permitted to live among one’s peers; but the public realm itself, the *polis*, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to

[256] Paul Williams, “I Am a Negro,” *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 162.

> show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aien aristeuein*).[257]

When Williams demands to be seen as an individual in the "I Am a Negro" essay, he is working to activate the space of appearance. As Kristina Wilson argues along with Sociologist George Lipsitz, "struggles for racial justice require more than mere inclusion into previously excluded places. They also necessitate creation of a counter social warrant with fundamentally different assumptions about place than the white spatial imaginary allows."[258] In the photo with Golden State Mutual executives (Fig. 8) in a space created by Black professionals for the good of Black citizens, Williams meets with his equals and is thus able to articulate his extraordinary achievements. Amongst a group of extraordinary men, he is distinguished, showing what makes him the best of all. As Kristina Wilson describes Williams "was caught in a publicity matrix during his lifetime where both White and non-White audiences tended to see him as representative of all Black professionals-or more insidiously, all Black men."[259]

Coincidentally, not long after these photographs were made, alarmed by the Soviet deployment of the Sputnik satellite in 1957, which Hannah Arendt describes as "second in importance to no other, not even to the splitting of the atom,"[260] the philosopher was compelled to consider what it meant to be human through the phrase *vita activa*,[261] "in order to arrive at an understanding of

[257] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 41.

[258] George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2011), 54 quoted in Kristina Wilson, *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 6.

[259] Kristina Wilson, *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design* (Princeton University Press, 2021), 44.

[260] Hannah Arendt, "Prologue," *The Human* Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 1.

[261] Arendt traces the term to the trial of Socrates and notes that in the Middle Ages it still carried its original meaning in Augustine's writings: "a life devoted to public-political matters." Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 12.

the nature of society as it had developed and presented itself at the very moment when it was overcome by the advent of a new and unknown age."[262]

In *The Human Condition*, Arendt proposes that "three fundamental human activities: labor, work, and action"[263] are "essential characteristics of human existence."[264] Each human activity corresponds to a basic condition of life on earth, and each is connected to the most basic condition of birth (natality) and death (mortality).[265] Arendt makes a fine distinction between labor and work – "the work of our hands, as distinguished from the labor of our bodies."[266] While labor is associated with "the biological process of the human body,"[267] work corresponds to "an 'artificial' world of things, distinctly different from all natural surroundings"[268] of which the photograph might serve as an exemplar for the purpose of this examination. One labors to survive, whereas when one works, one

> fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice. They are mostly, but not exclusively, objects for use and they possess the durability Locke needed for the establishment of property, the 'value' Adam Smith needed for the exchange market, and they bear testimony to productivity, which Marx believed to be the test of human nature.[269]

---

[262] Hannah Arendt, "Prologue," *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 6.
[263] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7.
[264] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 10.
[265] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 9.
[266] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 136.
[267] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7.
[268] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7.
[269] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 136.

According to Arendt, “work and its product, the human artifact, bestow a measure of permanence and durability upon the futility of moral life and the fleeting character of human time.”[270]

Arendt asserts that action is the only human condition “that goes on directly between men without the intermediary of things or matter.”[271] Further, “action alone is the exclusive prerogative of man; neither a beast nor a god is capable of it, and only action is entirely dependent upon the constant presence of others.”[272] For Arendt, action involves declaring the self, speech, persuasion, memory, history, storytelling, and the practice of freedom. Frederick Douglass’s thinking on photography – that picture making qualifies the human condition and that the interiority that it prompts leads to criticism, which itself can then lead to progress – anticipates Arendt’s argument. Where labor belongs to the private realm, work belongs to the social, which is neither public nor private. However, because action is linked to the condition of plurality[273] – that humans share the conditions of being human – and involves multiple people who must gather in a common place to see and respond to an act, action belongs to the realm of the public. Therefore, “since photography is always an action taken in the plural,” Azoulay explains, “no one can be the author of the photograph.”[274]

Arendt finds force in the act of speech, affirming “speech is what makes man a political being”[275] and arguing that

[270] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 8.
[271] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7.
[272] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 23.
[273] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 7.
[274] Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (London: Verso, 2012), 143-144.
[275] Hannah Arendt, “Prologue,” *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 3.

action and speech create a space between the participants which can find its proper location almost any time and anywhere. It is the space of appearance in the widest sense of the word, namely, the space where I appear to others as others appear to me, where men exist not merely like other living or inanimate things but make their appearance explicitly."[276]

According to Arendt, the space of appearance “does not always exist,” and “moreover, [no person] can live in it all the time.”[277] That understood, Arendt claims “to be deprived of [the space of appearance] means to be deprived of reality, which, humanly and politically speaking, is the same as appearance.”[278] Arendt cogently observes, “to men the reality of the world is guaranteed by the presence of others, by its appearing to all.”[279]

As such, photographic portraiture lends itself towards enacting the space of appearance, as Frederick Douglass’s practice of sitting for photographs demonstrates. On the other hand, Ralph Ellison’s protagonist, having been refused the space of appearance, is a non-being who retreats to a subterranean hostel of his own making. He is alienated from reality through his inability to act and declare his individuality – who he is. He embodies Arendt’s point that “the public realm . . . was reserved for individuality; it was the only place where men could show who they really and inexchangeably were.”[280] As Arendt explains,

[276] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 198-199.
[277] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 199.
[278] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 199.
[279] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 199.
[280] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 41.

> to live an entirely private life means above all to be deprived of things essential to a truly human life: to be deprived of the reality that comes from being seen and heard by others, to be deprived of an 'objective' relationship with them that comes from being related to and separated from them throgh the intermediary of a common world of things, to be deprived of the possibility of achieving something more permanent than life itself.[281]

In the *Civil Imagination of Photography*, Azoulay argues in conversation with Arendt that "the specific domain of the photograph" be understood "as a privileged site for the generation of a civil discourse."[282] Indeed, Azoulay declares that "the ontology of photography is, fundamentally, political."[283] Unlike Ellison's invisible man, Douglass refuses to go underground, instead sparking the space of appearance every time he sat for a photographic portrait and regenerating that civil space every time another person views his image. For Arendt,

> the space of appearance comes into being wherever men are together in the manner of speech and action, and therefore predates and precedes all formal constitution of the public realm and the various forms of government, that is, the various forms in which the public realm can be organized.[284]

[281] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 58.

[282] Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (London: Verso, 2012), 9-10.

[283] Ariella Azoulay, *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (London: Verso, 2012), 14.

[284] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (The University of Chicago Press, 1958), 199.

Similarly, through Azoulay's understanding of Arendt I find that Williams activates a space of appearance in his occupation portraits, having understood in some way that

> photography . . . deterritorializes citizenship, reaching beyond its conventional boundaries and plotting out a political space in which the plurality of speech and action (in Arendt's sense) is actualized permanently by the eventual participation of all the governed [in what Azoulay calls the "civil space of photography"]. These governed are *equally* not governed within this space of photography where no sovereign power exists.[285]

Within the photographic image, Williams acts against white supremacy while practicing his own freedom and modeling it for other Black people, even though he deprecates against white supremacy in "I Am a Negro."

Because no sovereign power exists within the space of appearance, Williams is able to make an appeal to the citizens of photography enacting what Azoulay describes as

> an assembly of civil skills that are not subject to nationality, but rather to borderless citizenship, to the modern citizenship of individuals who know, even when they are subject to boundless rule – and this is part of their civil skill – that the actual rule to which they are subject, in its concrete configuration, is always limited, always temporary, never final, even when there seems to be no exit from it.[286]

---

[285] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 25.

[286] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 26.

Through Azoulay, this chapter asserts that it is important to see the individuals gathered in the photograph of Williams with Golden State Mutual Executives (Fig. 8), and to meet Williams's gaze in the image of him posed by the bookcase (Fig. 9), in part because by doing so, the viewer re-activates the space of appearance in perpetuity. In these images, more so than in the image of Williams describing a model to a white client, the viewer enters the civil space of photography and there, is held responsible to hear the photographic subject's appeal.

Action

In *The Civil Contract of Photography* Azoulay "propose[s] to understand the photograph's unique status as a product of the encounter between a photographer, a photographed person and a tool, in the course of which none of these three can treat the other as a sovereign."[287] Azoulay goes on to outline "the ethics of the spectator" assuming that:

> Photographs do not speak for themselves. Alone, they do not decipher a thing. Identifying what is seen does not excuse the spectator from caring for its sense. And the sense of the photograph is subject to negotiation that unfailingly takes place vis-à-vis a single, stable, permanent image whose presence persists and demands that the spectators cast anchor in it whenever they seek to sail toward an abstraction that is detached from the visible and that then becomes cliché.[288]

[287] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 17.

[288] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 17.

Azoulay further extrapolates that the "tool" in which the photographer and a photographed person engage is citizenship, which she argues "is not merely a status, a good, or a piece of private property possessed by the citizen, but rather a tool for struggle or an obligation to others to struggle against injuries inflicted on those others, citizen and noncitizen alike – others who are governed along with the spectator."[289] Resoundingly, Azoulay argues, "when the photographed persons address me, claiming their citizenship in photography, they cease to appear as stateless or as enemies, the manners in which the sovereign regime strives to construct them. They call on me to recognize and restore their citizenship through my viewing."[290] The space of appearance activated, when Williams appeals to the viewer, he is no longer a "freak" and white supremacy ceases to reign. Azoulay affirms that "even when a spectator merely glances at a photograph without paying special attention to what appears in it, the photo rarely appears to the gaze as a mere object. The photo acts, thus making others act."[291] As an equal, the viewer can restore Williams's citizenship by recognizing his legacy. When the viewer sees Williams, he is made visible, and as long as the viewer continues to remember him, he cannot be erased.

Arendt stipulates that "action, in so far as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is for history."[292] Expanding upon this observation, she argues

[289] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* trans. Louise Bethlehem (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 14.
[290] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography* trans. Louise Bethlehem (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 17.
[291] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 137.
[292] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 8.

> in contradistinction to fabrication, where the light by which to judge the finished product is provided by the image or model perceived beforehand by the craftsman's eye, the light that illuminates the process of action, and therefore all historical processes, appears only at their end, frequently when all the participants are dead. Action reveals itself fully only to the storyteller, that is, to the backward glance of the historian, who indeed always knows better what it was all about than the participants."[293]

Beyond substantiating the artist's and art historian's work in a tremendous acknowledgement, as Sheldon S. Wolin explains, Arendt argues that "speech is constitutive of action, rescuing it from the void of meaninglessness by which it is forever being threatened and preserving it from the natural rhythms of coming-to-be [natality] and passing-away [mortality]. Speech alone, however, cannot preserve action."[294] Arendt affirms that "even though stories are the inevitable results of action, it is not the actor but the storyteller who perceives and 'makes' the story."[295]

Arguing an affinity between Grecian theatre and the *polis*, Arendt asserts that "the imitative element lies not only in the art of the actor, but, as Aristotle rightly claims, in the making or writing of the play."[296] Arendt thus describes the *polis* as

> a kind of organized remembrance. It assures the mortal actor that his passing existence and fleeting greatness will never lack the reality that comes from being seen, being heard, and, generally, appearing before an audience of fellow men, who outside the *polis* could attend only the short duration of the performance and

---

[293] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 192.

[294] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Hannah Arendt and the Ordinance of Time," in *Fugitive Democracy: And Other Essays*, ed. Nicholas Xenos (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 254, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv7n0ck0.16.

[295] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 192.

[296] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 187.

> therefore needed Homer and 'others of his craft' in order to be presented to those who were not there.[297]

Here, she scales the work of the storyteller/playwright as well as the audience to account for the importance of the arts and history, and to resolve the problem of mortality, being forgotten, and erasure. As Wolin explains, for Arendt,

> audience is a metaphor for the political community whose nature is to be a community of remembrance. But political communities are not exempt from mortality; they, too, will pass away unless there is someone to memorialize them. Behind, as it were, the political community and the political actors stands the storyteller, the one who preserves the memory of great actions, noble words, and genuine politics.[298]

Arendt explains, "to act, in its most general sense, means to take an initiative, to begin (as the Greek word *archein*, 'to begin,' 'to lead,' and eventually 'to rule,' indicates), to set something into motion."[299] Importantly, Azoulay adds to this,

> but those who have engaged with photography know very well that this moment of the photographic act, which is said to reach its end when incarnated in a final product, a print or digital file, is in fact a new beginning that lacks any predictable end. This is the precise definition of action that Arendt gives in order to distinguish it from work and labor.

[297] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 198.

[298] Sheldon S. Wolin, "Hannah Arendt and the Ordinance of Time," in *Fugitive Democracy: And Other Essays*, ed. Nicholas Xenos (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016), 254, https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv7n0ck0.16.

[299] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 177.

In describing with Arendt the photographic event as an act that constitutes a new beginning (natality), Azoulay allows this chapter to rest upon a brilliant element of Arendt's proposal – that freedom is ultimately bound to natality. Thinking about the Christian story of the birth of Christ in consideration of the concept of natality, Arendt writes:

> The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from its normal, 'natural' ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is ontologically rooted. It is, in other words, the birth of new men and the new beginning, the action they are capable of by virtue of being born.[300]

Arendt goes on to explain, "with the creation of man, the principle of beginning came into the world itself, which, of course, is only another way of saying that the principle of freedom was created when man was created but not before."[301]

When Williams practices freedom through occupation photographs, he also engages in an act that constitutes a new beginning. Not only does he engage with a community of remembrance in his appeal, but he also "open[s] doors for the next generation."[302] If, as Azoulay argues, the subject can choose to use the photographic plane as a civil space in which to make an appeal to viewers that is outside the power and constraints of the nation-state, in the images of Williams that I have gathered for this conversation, I argue that Williams's appeal is subtle but nonetheless political and constitutes civil disobedience. To use Mitchell's formulation, Williams's

---

[300] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 247.
[301] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958), 177.
[302] Karen Grisby Bates and Melissa Block, "A Trailblazing Black Architect Who Helped Shape L.A.," All Things Considered, *NPR*, June 22, 2012, https://www.npr.org/2012/06/22/155442524/a-trailblazing-black-architect-who-helped-shape-l-a.

occupation photographs reverberate with the tensions of class accession and its cousin, the challenge of racial covenants that Williams had so clearly dedicated his professional life towards overcoming. By performing the work of the architect for photographs, Williams worked against the erasure of that subjectivity. He achieves this legacy by making an appeal to future viewers, arguing his achievements, and recording his political acts within the civil space of photography.

Chapter 3

Sites of Trouble: Deserving a Place in the World

"Go out there, speak up, speak out. Get in the way. Get in good trouble. Necessary trouble, and help redeem the soul of America."
– John Lewis on the 55th Anniversary of the Bloody Sunday March 7, 2020 [303]

Paul R. Williams wrote in his autobiographical notes, "one of the greatest assets in preserving our democratic society is the American home."[304] As an architect who specialized in residential building and served on several government bodies concerned with housing, it is not surprising that Williams equated home ownership with citizenship. Throughout Williams's life, the voting rights of Black Americans had been contested, dismissed, and overrun. Just as formidable, Black poverty had been systematically enshrined through laws and vigilante violence that continued to refuse the rights and privileges of full citizenship to Black Americans long after the Emancipation Proclamation and the end of the Civil War. Witnessing and experiencing firsthand a multivalent national blockade on Black home ownership, Williams reasoned that the severe lack of home ownership by Black Americans fundamentally brewed discontent which was erupting over and over in cities across the United States by the 1960s.

For Williams, the conditions for a healthy democracy rested on both the availability of affordable housing and the freedom of middle-class people to choose where they lived. In this way, Williams conceived of a citizen as necessarily a consumer and a worker who is granted

[303] Devan Cole, "John Lewis urges attendees of Selma's 'Bloody Sunday' commemorative march to 'redeem the soul of America' by voting," *CNN*, March 1, 2020, https://www.cnn.com/2020/03/01/politics/john-lewis-bloody-sunday-march-selma/index.html.
[304] Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect*, New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 45.

participation in the civil realm through their work, then offered choice through the value of their earned wages. For Williams, whose parents migrated to Los Angeles in search of safety, a healthy climate, and work opportunities, home ownership emblematically qualified the benefits of citizenship and what freedom afforded. Thus, the legal obstruction of home ownership to Blacks occluded their participation in the economy and cut off the potential influence Black people might exert as taxpayers. This important aspect of liberal citizenship thwarted resulted in obvious disempowerment for Black Americans and brought their alienation to an untenable strain. Williams recognized in the resulting crises of the 1960s, and 70s that the systematic denial of Black homeownership restricted a basic feature of popular American formulations of freedom – the right to vote, to choose, and to have a say – and he thus worked pointedly in his occupation photographs to break the blockade.

Williams also noted in his personal journals, "even though the industrial revolution has caused many families to break up their old homes and move to greener pastures elsewhere, we are still the greatest nation of homeowners in the world."[305] But hovering over Williams's idealism is the question of who is granted the status of citizen – in Hannah Arendt's formulation, who has the right to have rights? As Williams explains in the "I Am a Negro" essay,

> if it is true that the Negro must lift himself by his own bootstraps to a higher cultural and economic level, it is also true that the white man who gave him citizenship and who must, therefore, be his neighbor, affected by the same conditions, should recognize the strides he is making.[306]

[305] Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect*, New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 45.
[306] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 163.

Williams demands to be seen, but here, expands his call that Black Americans be recognized for their efforts to live the American dream and champion the cause of democracy.

Setting aside Williams's professed indebtedness relative to citizenship as a gift to Black folks from white saviors, Williams indicates that the work he engaged with individual white clients slowly but surely demonstrated the skills and knowledge that he as a Black professional could offer, and importantly chipped away at racial bias. In occupation photographs that staged his work, Williams sets himself up as a model of integration who has demonstrated what is possible when Black and white people work together towards common aims. At the same time, he stresses that equality is a necessary condition of citizenship, and for Williams, the ability to establish oneself through property ownership was a key component of equity. In other words, Williams articulates the home as the very *site* of citizenship.

Chapters 1 and 2 demonstrate that Williams troubles the systemic racism that deployed nearly insurmountable hurdles for Black professionals like himself in joining white-collar/whites only professions. Understanding as Andrea Gibbons argues in *City of Segregation* (2018) that "land is in fact a place where economics and ideologies come together, and where an intensely racist past lives on forcefully into our present,"[307] in this chapter, I will cast a broader view to scope the terrain of Williams's success while looking to discern the responsibility that Williams held to Black Angelinos having achieved as an individual what was not supposed to be possible. This examination seeks to trouble the terrain – the *sites* – in which Williams practiced architecture, while critically evaluating the role Williams took on, neglected, or deflected, as a citizen

[307] Andrea Gibbons, "Introduction," *City of Segregation: 100 Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles* Kindle Edition (London: Verso, 2018), 6.

architect. By portraying himself in occupation portraits as an exemplary Black man, and staging appeals that urged the Black community to themselves – individual by individual – enact Frederick Douglass's vision of the self-made man, this chapter asks how Williams held himself accountable, and was then held by his own community of remembrance?

The *sights cubed* approach distinguishes the *site* of trouble as both the operation of a site in cultivating or blocking political trouble, as well as the physical space that is shaped through the photographic event such that the terrain or space photographed then functions as a representation of a political cause or contestation of power. This dissertation conceives of *sites* of trouble as activated by viewers and troublemakers who discern the space (physical, abstract, or imagined) as a place of struggle through the photographic event. Under the forces of collective viewing, and the telling of counter-histories and narratives of dissent that are cultivated through the civil contract of photography, physical *sites* of trouble become spaces of appearance where the injured may claim a voice and be heard. This chapter will follow the activation of spaces of appearance as *sites* of struggle are photographed, the space itself becomes a consequential subject and as such, these places do much more than memorialize.

Having become what Frederick Douglass envisioned as the self-made man, this chapter will continue to examine Williams's writings alongside his occupation portraits to demonstrate the operation of a *site* of trouble in those photographs. In his work as an architect specializing in residential building, gaining access to white space by designing the very spaces that white people lived in was a subversive and necessary component of his political troubling of racism. Williams's work in neighborhoods in which he could not purchase nor reside in a home despite

having achieved well beyond what could have been expected of any American should be understood as a form of agitation. Though he handled the potential for violence and aggression with decorum, he nonetheless stood firmly against racial segregation, other forms of redlining, and racial covenants that prevented Black progress. In this chapter, emerging counter narratives from the two previous chapters will be connected to consider the scale and magnitude of the forces that Williams troubled, while also tracing how his trouble was picked up and carried forward by his community of remembrance. In the following tarry with the *sites* of trouble that Williams activated, this chapter seeks to hear Williams's claims and agrees to join his work.

Deserving a Place in the World

While images of Paul R. Williams working outside exist, apart from the photo by Julius Shulman of Williams in front of the LAX theme building c. 1961 (Fig. 12),[308] they are today used infrequently by the press. It is apt to this chapter's conversation, however, to begin with a photograph of Williams with his wife Della,[309] and a client who stands behind the seated couple that was likely taken in Lake Arrowhead in the late 1920s or 30s (Fig. 13) Centered in the photo, Williams leans his right shoulder slightly into the fabric sling of a camping chair, looking casual but not quite at ease, while Della strikingly meets the viewer's gaze with an unwavering and

[308] There is some controversy as to whether Williams helped to design this part of the airport. Architectural historian Rebecca Choi advises in an episode of *Lost LA* that Williams's firm helped to design the airport terminals, but that William Pieria's firm designed the theme building. Nathan Masters, *Lost LA*, directed by Matt Bass Season 4, Episode 4 (December 2, 2019), https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2z-M-EfwUo. However, Hudson states that "Williams, in association with Pereira & Luckman and Welton Becket and Associates designed new terminal facilities and the futuristic theme building at the Los Angeles airport." Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 194.

[309] Della Williams was herself a leader in the Black community as a charter member of the Los Angeles Links, co-founding the Wilfandel Club, and sitting on the board of the Assistance League of the Stovall Home among other civic and social activities.

untrusting glare. In the idyllic setting, Della remarkably takes on Frederick Douglass's famous scowl. Both Paul and Della are dressed smartly in white suiting, he in a sleeveless sweater vest, and each with spectator shoes and trousers that immediately connote visions of F. Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* (1925). Trees, ferns, and giant pinecones encircle the small fenced-in deck where the Williams rest. The presumed client forms the apex of an obtuse triangle, standing with her left leg resting on a foothold behind the architect's body, her left hand resting on her raised thigh, and her right hand at her hip. She smiles brightly but is somewhat hard to notice given the handsome couple at the forefront.

While the Lake Arrowhead image can be described as a family photo because it was taken while Williams was working with a client, it also serves as an early example of Williams's practice of sitting for occupation photos. Just as Douglass experimented with poses and styling, Williams, too begins to work out a formula for conveying his work and knowledge. Deducing from the style of clothes and apparent age of the Williamses, by the time the photo was made, Williams had opened his first architectural firm, won important design competitions, and had already designed and built about fifty residences in L.A., Pasadena, Palm Springs and surrounding regions, as well as a church, school, post office, car showroom, mortuary, and two YMCAs. Nonetheless, although Williams was being courted by wealthy white clients, the photo seems to indicate that he had not yet been welcomed into the *polis*.

Hannah Arendt defines the *polis* as a space in which citizens debate, where criticism is practiced, and forward moment is agreed upon. In his commentary on citizenship, Williams subtly suggests that Black Americans have yet to be granted access to the space of appearance, and thus have no

site to articulate their struggle and voice their claims. Rather than wave a flag or demonstrate for voting rights, activities that held considerable physical and professional risk for a Black architect, Williams holds place and associates his visible body with quintessential American *sites* like the western forest to align his image with the principles of freedom and progress.[310] The Lake Arrowhead occupation photograph emphatically makes the case that Black bodies in white spaces are not inherently destructive. What's more, the Williamses perform American respectability as they sit together on the Lake Arrowhead deck – they know they belong in this space, but they also know that there are many in the U.S. who would violently remove them. They gaze unflinchingly.

Although the white client presides over the scene from the background, in the Lake Arrowhead photograph, the Williamses work to prove themselves able to afford, care for, and uphold the value of property. Though the point may seem small, for Williams and other people of color working against racial segregation as set up and enforced by real estate, insurance, and mortgage lending regimes in the 20th century, the trouble they enacted had to endure exhausting formulations. By daring to inhabit the white domestic and administrative spaces he designed, Williams utilizes the significations of the *site* in which he is photographed to press against the limitations of legal segregation and racial covenants, ultimately pushing these forms of racism to their breaking points.

[310] That is not to say that Williams was not otherwise politically active – he campaigned for liberal Republican Nelson Rockefeller and served as a delegate in the Republican National Convention of 1952 and 1960. Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 32. Rockefeller championed public housing, significantly expanded public space, and made remarkable strides enacting prohibitions on racial and gender discrimination in civil employment and housing as Governor of New York.

Williams articulates his thinking on homeownership as signifier of citizenship in two acceptance speeches awarded to him at the height of his career. First, the NAACP's Spingarn Medal in 1953, and again in his acceptance speech for the Scottish Rite Masons of Oakland, CA Service Award in 1956, in which he directs his comments to Black members of the audience asking, "Wouldn't it be great to be known as the minority group which has the greatest percentage of home owners? THIS we CAN do. THIS will automatically erase any stigma of SECOND CLASS CITIZENSHIP. THIS will make us tax-paying citizens with a VOICE"[311] (emphasis original).

Notably, the home that the Williams family owned at the time of the Lake Arrowhead photo was a "modest"[312] two bedroom, one bathroom bungalow built in 1905 (Fig. 14) "in an unrestricted, comparatively undesirable section of Los Angeles."[313] The home is located at 1271 West 35th Street in the West Adams neighborhood of South Los Angeles and must have represented to Williams the stagnation of Black communities – lives held in limbo by the numerous and various efforts by whites at the national, state, and local level to prevent Black enfranchisement, fair pay, unionization, entrepreneurship, and home ownership. The Williamses raised their two daughters in the West Adams home but were blocked from building their own home until much later in their lives, when Williams was one of the most well-known architects in the country because of racially restrictive covenants. For all his extraordinary success, outside of the occupation photos

---

[311] Paul R. Williams, "Spingarn Medal Acceptance Speech," NAACP Annual Convention (Kiel Auditorium, St. Louis, MO: June 26, 1953) 40-41, https://hv-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/pdfs/001410/001410_008_0772/001410_008_0772_From_1_to_64.pdf

[312] Los Angeles Conservancy, https://www.laconservancy.org/issues/paul-revere-williams-house.

[313] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59, and Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect*, New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 32.

that he helped to craft, Williams was nonetheless bound to signifiers of his oppression and marginalization, and the *site* of the West Adams home marked that injustice.

Justifiably, for Black Americans, the idea of the home is rife with the entanglements of racism and the abysmal failure of the U.S. to resolutely break from white supremacy after the Civil War. Douglass opens the second part of *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* (1892) with an illustration (likely made from a photograph) of his Cedar Hill home in Washington D. C.[314] The placement of the image of "his present home in Washington" in the narrative detailing his escape from slavery and life as a freedman offers a compelling signifier of both his freedom and his success. From this space, he deliberates and continues his work to secure equal and full citizenship for Black Americans. In this gesture, especially in combination with his photographic self-portraits, Douglass utilizes the home and its connotative meanings to declare his entry into the space of appearance.

Likewise, in W. E. B. Du Bois's essential account of the immediate aftermath of the Civil War, *Black Reconstruction in American 1860 – 1880* (1935), the sociologist and civil rights leader meticulously outlines the multiple ways in which Black Americans reimagined and worked to rebuild their lives and livelihoods after emancipation. Du Bois remarks, "if the basic problem of Reconstruction in the South was economic, then the kernel of the economic situation was the land,"[315] later asserting that

---

[314] Frederick Douglass, *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* revised edition, (Boston: De Wolfe & Fiske, Co, 1892), 243.

[315] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in American 1860 – 1880* (1935), (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 367.

> the Negro unerringly and insistently led the way [towards resolution]. The main question to which the Negroes returned again and again was the problem of owning land. It was ridiculed as unreasonable and unjust to the impoverished landholders of the South, and as a part of the desire for revenge which the North had. But in essence it was nothing of the sort.[316]

Ta-Nehisi Coates follows in a long line of scholars in further arguing the case. In his 2014 essay, "The Case for Reparations," for *The Atlantic*, Coates cites research by sociologist Patrick Sharkey confirming that

> just as black families of all incomes remain handicapped by a lack of wealth, so too do they remain handicapped by their restricted choice of neighborhood. Black people with upper-middle-class incomes do not generally live in upper-middle-class neighborhoods. Sharkey's research shows that black families making $100,000 typically live in the kinds of neighborhoods inhabited by white families making $30,000.[317]

The unequal buying power that Williams experiences in the 1930s into the 1950s, when he was finally able to build a home of his own, is a condition that Black individuals continue to suffer from. As Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor argues, "Whether renters or owners, African Americans continue to fall behind in racial wealth in ways that will make it impossible to catch up. African Americans also make up at least forty percent of the homeless population in the United States,

[316] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in American 1860 – 1880* (1935), (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 368.
[317] Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic* (June 2014), 16, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/.

the most profound expression of the housing insecurity that pervades Black communities."[318] Further, Taylor asserts, "the public policy myopia concerning this racial wealth gap has helped to normalize the idea that individuals or individual families should be responsible for accumulating the necessary wealth to compete and thrive in U.S. society."[319]

Yet, reflecting in "I Am a Negro" on his personal confrontations with racism while searching for his first jobs, Williams writes,

> as a young and sometimes resentful man, I overlooked the one essential fact, which is this: The Negro race must find its own salvation! It must solve its own problems, raise its own standards, *earn* its right to self-respect! Like every other race in the struggle upward from a common savagery, it must accomplish the climb individual by individual, family by family. It must forget its resentment of white superiority. And the whites of America must offer intelligent, not emotional, aid.[320]

Again, Williams insists on the acumen of the individual while deflecting responsibility for income disparities to the Black community by suggesting that Blacks, because they did not respect themselves, had not wrested itself from servitude. This was a common accusation into the 90s, exemplified in the 1965 Moynihan Report (*The Negro Family: The Case for National Action*) which, in its investigation of Black poverty accused Black women of promiscuity and Black men of neglecting their families to posit that Black poverty was caused by the link

---

[318] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race For Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), xvii.

[319] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race For Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), xvii.

[320] Williams describes the naysayer as an instructor in Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 162.

between ghetto culture and slavery. Perhaps unwittingly magnifying Moynihan's well-known racial bias, during a commencement address at the historically Black Howard University, President Johnson responded to the report by declaring, "In far too many ways American Negroes have been another nation: deprived of freedom, crippled by hatred, the doors of opportunity closed to hope."[321] Johnson expounded that

> the barriers to that freedom are tumbling down. Freedom is the right to share, share fully and equally, in American society–to vote, to hold a job, to enter a public place, to go to school. It is the right to be treated in every part of our national life as a person equal in dignity and promise to all others.[322]

Johnson famously declared, "But freedom is not enough," offering statistics revealing racial injustice and gross inequity – what could have been a promising moment in American politics – to explain that "we are not completely sure" why racial inequality persists. Ultimately, however Johnson places blame on "the breakdown of the Negro family structure."[323] Williams's comments regarding home ownership reflect this sentiment to some degree. To find his nuance, one must look to Williams's occupation photos.

Gerald Horne argues in *Fire This Time* (1995) that the Moynihan Report's "targeting [of] black women was part of a parallel initiative–the 'culture of poverty' thesis–that displaced concern

[321] Lyndon B. Johnson, "To Fulfill These Rights," Howard University Commencement Address, The American Presidency Project, (June 4, 1965) UC Santa Barbara, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/241312.
[322] Lyndon B. Johnson, "To Fulfill These Rights," Howard University Commencement Address, The American Presidency Project, (June 4, 1965) UC Santa Barbara, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/241312.
[323] Lyndon B. Johnson, "To Fulfill These Rights," Howard University Commencement Address, The American Presidency Project, (June 4, 1965) UC Santa Barbara, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/241312.

from unemployment, housing, education, and transport to family structure and gender."[324] The enthusiasm with which American media covered the report and neglected contrary evidence fueled backlash against feminism and the civil rights movement. As Horne further explains, "lost in this morass was the fact that the family is socially constructed. It is not just a biological arrangement but a product of specific conditions shaped by the socioeconomic structure. It is not a separate sphere; that is, it cannot be comprehended in isolation from factors like housing and education."[325] Williams, like many Americans, suffered from a myopic view that led him to believe that Black families could, through their own countenance, resist the enormous strain produced by systemic racism.

However, as Coates and numerous scholars have argued, the *New York Times* "1619 Project"[326] among them, Black Americans have indeed always been actively engaged in social, economic, and civil work, having to resist all along the way the forces of a liberal democracy and its so-called free markets that professes equality and liberty, but nonetheless work against Black folk's efforts to establish the foothold that Williams's client in Lake Arrowhead so confidently secures. As Du Bois decries in *Black Reconstruction*, "The abolition of slavery meant not simply abolition of legal ownership of the slave; it meant the uplift of slaves and their eventual incorporation into the body civil, politic, and social, of the United States."[327] As Williams's Lake Arrowhead photograph proclaims, that promise has yet to be honored. In her own family's

---

[324] Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (1995), (Virginia: DaCapo Press, 1997), 230.

[325] Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (1995). Virginia: DaCapo Press, 1997, 230.

[326] *NYT* "1619 Project," https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html.

[327] Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in American 1860 – 1880* (1935), (New York: The Free Press, 1998), 189.

participation in the Great Migration, then her veteran father's story, Nikole Hannah-Jones offers this pointed response to Williams:

> Like all the black men and women in my family, he believed in hard work, but like all the black men and women in my family, no matter how hard he worked, he never got ahead. So when I was young, th[e] flag outside our home never made sense to me. How could this black man, having seen firsthand the way his country abused black Americans, how it refused to treat us as full citizens, proudly fly its banner? I didn't understand his patriotism. It deeply embarrassed me.[328]

What is disconcerting to Hannah-Jones is that her father, and I would add the majority of Black Americans, believe so unfailingly in the American project, even while the nation has refused their full citizenship in so many ways.

Richard Rothstein further details in, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (2017), "until long after emancipation from slavery, African Americans were denied access to free labor markets and were unable to save from wages. This denial of access was another badge of slavery that Congress was duty bound to eliminate."[329] Thus, Frederick Douglass's and Paul R. Williams's emphatic representations of their status as workers through occupation photos amounts to a radical act that works against anti-Black oppression. As Rothstein along with Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor's *Race For Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (2019) and Melvin L. Oliver's

[328] Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true.," New York Times, August 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html.

[329] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 154.

and Thomas W. Shapiro's *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality* (2006) argues, at every level of government and the law, representatives elected by voters who did not reflect population demographics due to rampant voter suppression determined to perpetuate, even extend, wealth inequality via segregation. With every inflection point in U.S. history since the Civil War, policy, law, and oversight has worked against racial equality.

When Della Williams scowls at the viewer of the Lake Arrowhead photo, then Williams recounts in the "I Am a Negro" essay that he builds homes in neighborhoods where his family was blocked from living themselves, the couple bristles against the tyranny of multiple forms of oppression: state sanctioned racial covenants, federally orchestrated segregation, and the ever-present specter of white violence against Black folks who dared to criticize racism or challenge white fortifications against Black home ownership. As Andrea Gibbons enumerates, by the time the Lake Arrowhead photo was taken, white homeowners and property developers across the nation had established fierce private homeowner's associations that effectively installed and enforced what were considered private agreements between property owners and buyers to bar the sale of property to people of color across the nation. Indeed,

> California pioneered protective zoning, although its attempt to thus limit Chinese residence was struck down by state courts in 1892. Unable to enforce racial restrictions on their land through zoning, property owners turned to private agreements—the desire for segregated white space being stronger than a court ruling. Prominent race attorney Willis O. Tyler believed the first covenant [in

California] was from 1900; it restricted property against "sales or transfers to Negroes or Mongolians or persons of Asiatic blood."[330]

Perhaps not coincidentally, California followed the implementation of racial covenants in real estate agreements while the field of architecture began to distinguish itself from trades through licensure and educational requirements.

As Rothstein outlines, in 1934, "to solve the inability of middle-class renters to purchase single-family homes for the first time, Congress and President Roosevelt created the Federal Housing Administration" which insured private mortgages, resulting in a significant drop in interest rates and lengthening the terms from five to twenty years. [331] However, in order to qualify for an FHA mortgage, the agency conducted "its own appraisal of the property to make certain that the loan had a low risk of default."[332] Included in training manuals for FHA appraisers were directions such as those published in the first *Underwriting Manual* published in 1935: "If a neighborhood is to retain stability it is necessary that properties shall continue to be occupied by the same social and racial classes. A change in social or racial occupancy generally leads to instability and a reduction in values."[333] To this point, Rothstein asserts that "statistical evidence contradicted the FHA's assumption that the presence of African American caused the property values of whites to fall. Often racial integration caused property values to increase" because Black renters and "middle-class families had few other housing alternatives, they were willing to pay prices far

[330] Andrea Gibbons, *City of Segregation: 100 Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles* Kindle Edition (London: Verso, 2018), 23.

[331] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 64-65.

[332] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 64.

[333] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 65.

above fair market values. In short, the FHA policy of denying African Americans access to most neighborhoods itself created conditions that prevented property values from falling when African Americans did appear."[334]

Nevertheless, Rothstein asserts, "because the FHA's appraisal standards included a whites-only requirement, racial segregation . . . became an official requirement of the federal mortgage insurance program."[335] Add to this, as Ta-Nehisi Coates explains, the FHA

> adopted a system of maps that rated neighborhoods according to their perceived stability. On the maps, green areas, rated 'A,' indicated 'in demand' neighborhoods that, as one appraiser put it, lacked 'a single foreigner or Negro.' These neighborhoods were considered excellent prospects for insurance. Neighborhoods where black people lived were rated 'D' and were usually considered ineligible for FHA backing. They were colored in red. Neither the percentage of black people living there nor their social class mattered. Black people were viewed as a contagion. Redlining went beyond FHA-backed loans and spread to the entire mortgage industry, which was already rife with racism, excluding black people from most legitimate means of obtaining a mortgage.[336]

Racial covenants, redlining, predatory mortgage schemes, and the great difficulty of qualifying for a federally insured mortgage made Black homeownership in the United States a formidable

[334] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 94.
[335] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017), 65.
[336] Ta-Nehisi Coates, "The Case for Reparations," *The Atlantic* (June 2014), 9, https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/.

idea at best well into the 1970s. Williams recognizes these mechanisms at play in his Spingarn address when he remarks on the low quality and shabby construction of houses in what he describes as "old or middle-aged neighborhoods which were once the homes of the pioneers, and which are usually located around the fringe of the cheaper business districts."[337] He details the neglect and desperation in such places, stating "the owners have moved out and have no interest in upkeep except to collect rent from an unfortunate in the low-income bracket."[338] But Williams takes a decidedly utopian position when he then urges,

> ABANDON IT. I think 90% of the homes in America built 60 years ago are unfit for our standard of living today and should be torn down. That property, combined with adjoining property and developed into one of the many modern multiple housing units, will take care of the close-in needs of the city."[339]

He further comments a decade later in the *Ebony* "If I Were Young Today" article,

> If I were young today I would start with the need for the development of the small home with the thought that a charming inexpensive small home could be produced for the masses by forgetting the formula of houses today and mixing imagination with my thinking. What the world needs today is a new concept for a substantial, economical house that can be built for the sales price of a good automobile. Solve this and the world is your market.[340]

---

[337] Paul R. Williams, "Spingarn Medal Acceptance Speech," NAACP Annual Convention (Kiel Auditorium, St. Louis, MO: June 26, 1953) 39, https://hv-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/pdfs/001410/001410_008_0772/001410_008_0772_From_1_to_64.pdf.

[338] Paul R. Williams, "Spingarn Medal Acceptance Speech," NAACP Annual Convention (Kiel Auditorium, St. Louis, MO: June 26, 1953) 39, https://hv-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/pdfs/001410/001410_008_0772/001410_008_0772_From_1_to_64.pdf.

[339] Paul R. Williams, "Spingarn Medal Acceptance Speech," NAACP Annual Convention (Kiel Auditorium, St. Louis, MO: June 26, 1953) 39, https://hv-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/pdfs/001410/001410_008_0772/001410_008_0772_From_1_to_64.pdf.

[340] Paul Williams, "If I Were Young Today," *Ebony*, August 1963, 56.

While Williams may have understood his remarks to be a rallying cry for the Black community, and solid advice for young Black entrepreneurs, they offer an acute sting to the contemporary scholar's sense of the issues at hand in the way that they seemingly overlook systemic racism while charging Black folks solely with the enormous responsibility of upending oppression. Indeed, Williams seems unusually enabled in his own ability to "forget" and accept white superiority. Where Douglass is acutely aware of the political foundations of racism in the U.S. Constitution – the original sin of slavery and its aftermaths – Williams's commentary to Black communities suggests an overly optimistic view of the force and power of anti-Blackness at play in his own time, as well as looking into the future.

In his Spingarn Medal acceptance speech, Williams affirms, "one of these days we are going to forget this 'Negro' business and earn our laurels for high standard of service."[341] For Williams, the problem of racism amounts to a logical exercise in proving one's worth. Furthermore, in his autobiographical comment, "the industrial revolution has caused many families to break up their old homes and move to greener pastures elsewhere,"[342] he disappointingly exhibits imperial aphasia for the Great Migration that his own parents participated in and seems woefully unaware of the turmoil facing the audience in Oakland, CA[343] while the Second Great Migration was underway.

---

[341] Paul R. Williams, "Spingarn Medal Acceptance Speech," NAACP Annual Convention (Kiel Auditorium, St. Louis, MO: June 26, 1953) 39-41, https://hv-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/pdfs/001410/001410_008_0772/001410_008_0772_From_1_to_64.pdf

[342] Karen E. Hudson, *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect* (New York: Rizzoli, 1994), 45.

[343] Rothstein describes, Richmond, CA, which is today just a 20-minute drive from Oakland, CA, as "a town with the region's greatest concentrations of African Americans." Richard Rothstein, "If San Francisco, Then Everywhere?" in *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, (New York: Liveright: 2017), 3.

Williams explains his aphasia in a sanguine pivot in the "I Am a Negro" essay:

> Eventually, however, as I grew older and thought more clearly, I found in my condition an incentive to personal accomplishment, an inspiring challenge. Without having the wish to 'show them,' I developed a fierce desire to 'show myself.' I wanted to vindicate every ability I had. I wanted to acquire new abilities. I wanted to prove that I, *as an individual*, deserved a place in the world.[344]

Writing for a white readership, Williams likely felt that he had to use coded language that would not incite potential clients, instead working to ameliorate racial bias.

The year that Williams was awarded the Spingarn, 1953, he was appointed to the National Housing Commission as well as an advisory committee on Government Housing Policies and Programs by President Eisenhower. Williams had previously served on the Los Angeles City Planning and Housing Commissions, and the state of California's Housing and Redevelopment Commissions. His work in these government bodies offers dynamic potential for understanding the conflicted terrain that Williams worked within as a Black architect in service to government agencies that unabashedly held up white supremacy. At the very least, Williams's service demonstrates a commitment to remedying complex webs of social injustice. The problem, of course, is that 100 years after John Brown's raid on Harper's Ferry, racial bias in America was just as thoroughly, if not more covertly, interwoven into the nation's political, civic, social, and domestic realms.

[344] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 161.

For Williams, having white clients and building in white neighborhoods must have held the possibility of himself being able to buy and own private property within the same spaces, a desire that he states in the "I Am a Negro" essay and has become part of his enduring mythology. But while deserving a place in the world was very much about being able to enter the white marketplace to both sell and buy, Williams's knowledge also led him into white political spaces where he was asked to participate in solving the problem that segregation had caused – Black folks were densely packed into urban dwellings that were not well kept (due to lack of regulation and enforcement of building codes for white property owners), and forced to pay a significant percentage of their earnings to rent because they were refused government loans and blocked from buying in most neighborhoods. Black communities needed affordable housing, but the U.S. government, property owners, and developers refused to make any concessions towards housing equity.

Williams, in his aspiration to ascend class understood himself to be deserving of a well-made home in a desirable neighborhood. However, he does not acknowledge nor critique in his writing and speeches the operation of racial codes that he has internalized and promoted: desirable = white space, and undesirable = Black space. Nonetheless, as Gibbons details, BIPOC

> groups forced the ghetto walls back in two ways: through an unorganized but constant pressure by individuals buying and occupying property against great odds, and through local attempts to organize wider campaigns against covenants.[345]

[345] Andrea Gibbons, "Introduction," *City of Segregation: 100 Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles* Kindle Edition (London: Verso, 2018), 20.

The significant risks that Black consumers undertook to exert the constant pressure that Gibbons describes should not be under emphasized. When Black families dared move into white neighborhoods they were vehemently harassed, their property damaged, and their lives threatened.

Eventually, after decades of litigation and strategizing, in 1948 the Supreme Court ruled that restrictive covenants were unconstitutional in Shelley v. Kraemer, determining that such directives in deeds and mutual agreements violate the 14th Amendment, which guarantees that

> No State shall make or enforce any law which shall abridge the privileges or immunities of citizens of the United States; nor shall any State deprive any person of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor deny to any person within its jurisdiction the equal protection of the laws.

While the Supreme Court's decision in 1948 began to make Black home ownership more of a possibility, stark income and wealth gaps continue to exist between BIPOC and white Americans, as do the reverberations of segregation. Reflecting on the persistence of segregated housing in particular, Gibbons argues:

> A segregated geography makes the likelihood of unsettling questions being raised by those in the suburbs vanishingly low. The discourses rationalizing this status quo, both the discrimination and the violence that traditionally maintained white neighborhoods as white, have formed the building blocks for today's hate-filled and accusatory refusals to engage with some of the uglier aspects of our past. In the face of the stubbornness of such resistance, it is crucial to remember that for most of American history, white supremacy has been openly, vigorously, and

> violently defended. Civil rights struggles have ensured that while white supremacist attitudes continue to be openly voiced by some, the mainstream at least gives lip service to equality and the universal provision of certain civil rights. Despite this, most have refused to be inconvenienced in order to achieve full equality.[346]

Taylor argues directly against Williams's idealism, asserting "the real issue here is how the insistence on homeownership as the solution to economic or racial inequality actually leaves African Americans behind. The value of Black people's homes will never catch up to their white peers." Taylor cogently outlines that the interventions necessary to bring wealth equity through homeownership would render the U.S. housing market unrecognizable and institute policies "antithetical to the way that the U.S. housing market functions within the private sector." Instead, Taylor pointedly argues that "the state can play a much more robust role in social provision and the promotion of the public's welfare"[347] through the expansion of government subsidized healthcare, welfare, and retirement programs. She cautions, however, that the state "cannot perform this role when public policies are yoked to the objectives of private enterprise and business interests."[348]

---

[346] Andrea Gibbons, "Introduction," *City of Segregation: 100 Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles* Kindle Edition (London: Verso, 2018), 10.

[347] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race For Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), xvii.

[348] Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor, *Race For Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership* (Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019), xvii.

Citizen Architect

In 1847, Douglass wrote in frustration to fellow abolitionist and friend, William Lloyd Garrison, "I have no love for America, as such; I have no patriotism. I have no country. What country have I? The Institutions of this Country do not know me—do not recognize me as a man."[349] Douglass's sentiment is echoed in Nikole Hannah-Jones embarrassment that her father insistently hangs a flag in the front of his home. For Douglass, the photograph was contradictorily efficient and precise, but also open to suggestion and manipulation, just as his with own citizenship in the U.S. as a Black man. Nonetheless, what captivated him about the photographic image was its ability to pull and fix internal thinking and deliberation while also then projecting ideas that might influence further thought. Given these complexities, Douglass understood that the photographic image marvelously holds the capacity to express the entanglements of American identity and the depth with which Black Americans sought to imagine their own personhood and citizenship. Just as important, through reproduction and wide dispersal, Douglass steadfastly demonstrated that photographs were cable of holding these states of being into the future. Thus, when Douglass then distributed photographic portraits of himself, he actively appealed to both contemporary and future viewers of his images. The appeal was clear and consistent – that Douglass was a free and thinking citizen of the United States. What was harder to fix was the Black person's access to citizenship.

Though the focus of this project remains dedicated to Williams's legacy, I want to turn again to the white client in the Lake Arrowhead photo (Fig. 13). Although exuding coolness, the

---

[349] Frederick *Douglass, "Country, Conscience, and the Anti-Slavery Cause: An Address Delivered in New York City, May 11, 1847," New York Daily Tribune, In Yale Macmillan Center, Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition, 2023, https://glc.yale.edu/country-conscience-and-anti-slavery-cause.*

Williamses display a degree of tension in the photo – they do not appear entirely comfortable in this space, and their apprehension was warranted. Although Williams may have very well trusted his client, that the Black couple entered a space owned by a white property owner could have easily suggested to neighboring property owners that the Williamses were looking to buy or rent. Countless stories would have confirmed their hesitation. As Rothstein summarizes:

> In the Los Angeles area, cross burning, dynamite bombings, rocks thrown through windows, graffiti, and other acts of vandalism, as well as numerous phone threats, greeted African Americans who found housing in neighborhoods just outside their existing areas of concentration.

Anticipating the 1948 Supreme Court ruling, in 1945, Los Angeles judge Thurmond Clarke evoked the 14th amendment deciding in favor of Black homeowners in Los Angeles's Sugar Hill neighborhood after eight white residents had attempted to evict them based on racial covenants. Yet, in the same year,

> an entire family-father, mother, and two children-was killed when its new home in an all-white neighborhood was blown up. Of the more than one hundred incidents of move-in bombings and vandalism that occurred in Los Angeles between 1950 and 1965, only one led to an arrest and prosecution–and that was because the California attorney general took over the case after local police and prosecutors claimed they were unable to find anyone to charge.[350]

[350] Richard Rothstein, *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*, (New York: Liveright: 2017), 147.

Given this tension, it can be difficult to understand how Williams engaged in such gentle tactics as drawing upside down and talking naïve white clients into hiring him while delicately tiptoeing around the fraught working conditions imposed on him as a Black professional. As argued earlier, the result is an uplifting story of an exceptional Black man who was able to overcome great difficulties. This is then endlessly repeated by claims that Williams's achievements have been forgotten, only to then be valiantly recovered and elevated by his family and community. The storytelling allows Williams's white clients to pat themselves on the back for having supported a Black architect's career as though they have engaged in social justice work while building an expensive mansion for themselves. As architectural historian David Gebhard writes, Williams's

> white clientele certainly engaged him because they admired his architecture, but one suspects that many of these clients also came to him because he was a talented *black* professional. Even before he began independent practice, he was seen within the California architectural profession as *the* individual who symbolized the emergence of African-Americans as successful professionals. A segment of the white upper middle class and wealthy, similarly, could demonstrate their feelings about the equality of the races by engaging him.[351]

The stories also offer a measure of redemption to owners of Williams's homes and other building projects whose association with Williams implies their lack of racism[352] which also happens to result in raising the value of said properties. As a *New York Times* article concerning Williams's

[351] David Gebbard, "Paul R. Williams and the Los Angeles Scene," in Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 22.

[352] I am intentionally using this phrase rather than "anti-racism" as I am skeptical that white clients of Williams, or later buyers of his homes, are actively involved in anti-racist work. Interviews with white owners of Williams homes in newspapers and online videos seem on the verge of declaring their color blindness.

legacy asserts, “Houses certified as Williams designs carry a premium in southern California's luxury housing market.”[353]

On the other hand, the stories characterize Williams as being adept and accommodating to racial prejudice allowing him to successfully overcome at least some measure of the racism of his era through his charismatic personality and strong work acumen – traits such as hard work, determination, and innate ability that are particularly valued in the American ethos. Williams remarks on this in the “I Am a Negro” essay writing,

> the weight of my racial handicap forced me, willy-nilly, to develop salesmanship. The average, well-established white architect, secure in his social connections, might be able to rest his hopes on his final plans; I, on the contrary had to devote as much thought and ingenuity to winning an adequate first hearing as to the execution of the detailed drawings.[354]

And yet, evidence of Williams’s accommodations to whites goes beyond salesmanship. For example, in his *The Small Home of Tomorrow* (1945) and *New Homes for Today* (1946), which offer generalized home designs for the middle-class that could be modified and sized according to individual needs, Williams includes designs for homes with designated bedrooms for “maids” and “servants.” While it can be argued that Williams was simply meeting demand, it must be emphasized that the demand he was meeting was white, and as a Black architect, he was put in the position of having to organize white spaces that specifically marginalized Black workers.

---

[353] Karen Grisby Bates, “He Was (and Is) The Architect to the Stars,” *New York Times*, July 26, 1990, https://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/26/garden/he-was-and-is-the-architect-to-the-stars.html?searchResultPosition=4 (accessed December 6, 2022).

[354] Paul Williams, “I Am a Negro,” *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 162.

One story in particular – a kind of origin myth – that Williams was able to convince the transportation businessman, E. L. Cord to offer him the commission on the architect's "first residence costing more than $100,000," a 32,000 square foot mansion in Beverly Hills with sixteen bedrooms and twenty-two bathrooms[355] by meeting Cord's "characteristic abruptness" with a promise to submit preliminary drawings within 24 hours is telling. As Williams told the story in the "I Am a Negro" essay, "I delivered those preliminary plans by the scheduled hour– but I did not tell him that I had worked for twenty-two hours, without sleeping or eating."[356] Hudson includes additional details on Williams's experience in an autobiographical note included in *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* in which Williams explains that he "pull[ed] this fast one" after having "read how Cass Gilbert landed the Woolworth Building: he drew a sketch right in front of Mr. Woolworth while all the other architects wanted at least two weeks. I wanted to see if I could work the same system."[357] The 1931 E. L. Cord residence proved pivotal in Williams's career, as Hudson describes, "becom[ing] a showplace in Beverly Hills and a standing advertisement for Paul R. Williams."[358] Yet Williams's own characterizations downplay his skill in favor of emphasizing the careful dexterity with which he negotiated racial bias.

A color photograph of Williams, taken before 1963,[359] but nearing Williams's retirement when the architect appears to have revisited several of his early projects, shows Williams standing at the edge of the front step of the Cord Residence with his right hand in his pocket (Fig. 15).[360] His

---

[355] Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 60.

[356] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *The American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 162.

[357] Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 61.

[358] Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 14.

[359] The Cord Residence was demolished in 1963 and developed into 13 separate lots, "E. L. Cord Residence, Beverly Hills, CA," *Paul Revere Williams Project*, https://www.paulrwilliamsproject.org/index.html.1.40.html.

[360] Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style* (New York: Rizzoli, 1993), 58.

face is lit by the sun, and his body is framed by a towering colonial door frame. The stately backdrop includes squared columns, made modern in their thinness relative to the wide (and tall) two-story entry porch that they hold, along with engaged Doric columns and a pediment with exaggerated dentils that handsomely frame a double door. The photo offers an impressive summation of Williams's version of the Georgian Revival style. The Cord residence testifies to the popularity of the modern construction of a colonial style after Bicentennial celebrations in 1876 and the 1920s.[361]

Just as with the *Ebony* photograph of Williams working at a drawing table in his office (Fig. 2), the later photo associates the architect with his work – the proximity of his body and selfhood work like a signature in declaring that the building was a product of his invention and labor. But the photograph's signification of Williams's with the United Sates via the architecture's decorative codes seems to respond to the architect's question concerning his citizenship from 1937, while incidentally reiterating Douglass's similarly minded question to William Lloyd Garrison: "Exactly what is my position in this nation which grants me the political rights of citizenship?"[362]

Kristine Wilson's consideration of Williams's books for new homeowners offers an adept reading of the architect's negotiations of whiteness and argues that Williams's emphasis on the comfort and safety that modernism offers homeowner provides a notable counter to the policing

[361] Kristina Wilson, "Introduction" in *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021), 19.

[362] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59.

of racialized boundaries and the idea of modernism as a force for the control of women's bodies that white authors of similar texts published in the same period.[363]

In practicing architecture, Williams insisted on his subjectivity, but in the Cord Residence photograph, Williams unequivocally articulates his citizenship in the U.S., his belonging within a professional field long fortified by whiteness, and his right to own property in a space of his choosing. That the entry door in the photograph is ajar (whether this was orchestrated or incidental) is no small detail given redlining, racially restrictive covenants, and outward hostility against Black homeowners by white neighbors. Thus, the posthumous photograph works as much to confirm the architect's agency as it does to protest the legalized segregation he and his family suffered through.

As Williams indicates in "I Am a Negro": "I foresee a future in which the two races, although forever divided, and rightly so, will work side by side toward the achievement of common goals which are not racial"[364] he does not appear to have been motivated by integrationist causes. Williams explains further,

> Of course, I know that I cannot be accepted socially by whites. I have no desire to be, for I firmly believe that the Negro, in order to break down the racial barriers that affect his business success, should be careful in preserving the social barriers that set him apart. I have defined those social barriers for my own guidance and made it a rule never to attend social gatherings where white women are present.[365]

---

[363] Kristina Wilson, "Introduction" in *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design* (Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2021), 18.

[364] Williams describes the naysayer as an instructor in Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *The American Magazine*, July 1937, n. 1, v. 124, 162.

[365] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 163.

In keeping with Arendtian thought, Williams distinguishes between the private, intimate realm of family, and the social realm of his work. For Williams, work involved white people and white spaces, whereas the private realm was exclusively Black. Owning property in what Williams euphemistically identifies as "a well to do district"[366] – which he distinguishes from the ability to purchase and afford property – was the signifier of full citizenship for Williams. As he urges in the Spingarn acceptance speech, for Williams, home ownership activated the space of appearance.

Hudson, in fearing her own grandfather's posthumous erasure and social death, employs and implores media to right the wrong. Cries bemoaning Williams as "forgotten" can be understood as Black folks in the present working against social death in the future. And though separated by decades, Williams was active in this work. He understood, as does his granddaughter, that Black success is easily subsumed, disregarded, and made illegible under the weight of white supremacy. However, in the occupation portraits that he actively self-styled, Williams fortifies his legacy to sustain such neglect, then calls upon his community of remembrance to continue this work into the future.

Communities of Remembrance

A problem with the mythology of Williams is that it insists on situating the architect's subjectivity in relation to whiteness. Just as Williams's high school instructor could not conceive that white folks would hire a Black architect, nor that Black folks would ever have the money to

[366] Paul Williams, "I Am a Negro," *American Magazine* 124, no. 1, (July 1937): 59.

build spaces of their own, Williams's professional practice is consistently measured against the validation of white clients. The often-repeated stories of Williams drawing upside down for white clients and having to coyly appeal to his white client's egos by being incredibly willing to adapt designs to white will demonstrate this problem in action. A threat consistently looms that Williams's subjectivity will be arrested. When Williams is honored, it is because of his subservience to white clients. According to Williams's own accounts, he was successful only because he was able to convince white clients to hire him, and later because there is value attached to his Blackness that made him an architect of interest. His notoriety and the value of the homes he built are always attached to the white clients that he served. This is a violence enacted on Williams's legacy, set into motion the day that he imagined himself capable of class and racial accension, and replicated in perpetuity by media that circulates the recipe of biography portraying the architect as arising from tragic beginnings to meet all the expectations of an "American success story." The paradox in this myth is that even though he accomplished the impossible, like early modern women painters, Williams's legacy is ever threatened with erasure, making his status as subject always volatile.

Nonetheless, Williams's submission to white supremacy did not go unnoticed by his community of remembrance. Determining to comment first on Williams's declaration that integration was not only impossible, but potentially disadvantageous for Black families, the NAACP published a rejoinder in *The Crisis* that worked hard to call Williams back. They begin:

> Many persons have spoken to THE CRISIS about this article . . . we are not inclined to criticize Mr. Williams unduly even though he has expressed some views diametrically opposed to those held by a great group of American citizens,

> black and white. We have known of Mr. Williams for many years and have been (and still are) proud of his achievements in his profession. If he chooses to believe in 1937 as did Booker T. Washington in 1895 that in all things social the races can be as separate as the fingers, but in other matters as united as the hand, that is his privilege.[367]

The editors of *The Crisis* make clear that by the 1930s, Williams had achieved a level of success that allowed him to test barriers that Black folks in less tolerant cities and with less wealth did not dare traverse. Indeed, they chastise Williams for his insensitivity in neglecting to recognize his privilege, writing,

> he has struggled, he says, to be regarded as an individual Negro, above the level of the Negro stereotyped in the public mind. He has succeeded. Whereas the average white man would not think of asking the average Negro to design a house for him, he now begs Paul Williams to design estates costing $100,000 and more.[368]

Pointedly, *The Crisis* editors ask, "but what of the millions of the masses of Paul Williams' race who do not have even a bootstrap by which to try to raise themselves?"[369] Further, *The Crisis* concludes, in agreement with Douglass's writings, that "the story of his struggle is inspiring, but

[367] "A Good Architect," Editorials, *The Crisis*, (September 1937), 273, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015010213083&view=1up&seq=586&size=175.
[368] "A Good Architect," Editorials, *The Crisis*, (September 1937), 273, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015010213083&view=1up&seq=586&size=175.
[369] "A Good Architect," Editorials, *The Crisis*, (September 1937), 273, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015010213083&view=1up&seq=586&size=175.

is in itself a powerful argument, not for establishing it as the pattern for others to follow but for changing our system to make it easier for others to achieve distinction and success."[370]

Though the controversy between Williams 1937 essay and *The Crisis* is not often recalled, it serves a remarkable example of his community calling him back. The retort is respectful and generous, while pointing to the blind spots that Williams's privilege afforded him. Considering this, Williams's work in public housing and city planning may be seen as a way of returning to the community of remembrance. And in kind, concern over the potential of Williams's legacy being forgotten can be understood as his community not only expanding but making good on their responsibility to remember his achievements. As Nikole Hannah-Jones reflects,

> I wish, now, that I could go back to the younger me and tell her that her people's ancestry started here, on these lands, and to boldly, proudly, draw the stars and those stripes of the American flag. We were told once, by virtue of our bondage, that we could never be American. But it was by virtue of our bondage that we became the most American of all.[371]

While writing this chapter, the Los Angeles Conservancy worked to have the Williams home in West Adams designated a Historic-Cultural Monument, protecting it from eminent destruction and the kind of redevelopment that Williams advocated for in 1953. In August 2021, the Los Angeles Conservancy petitioned the city to identify the home as a landmark and followed with a

---

[370] "A Good Architect," Editorials, *The Crisis*, (September 1937), 273, https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015010213083&view=1up&seq=586&size=175.

[371] Nikole Hannah-Jones, "Our democracy's founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true.," *New York Times*, August 14, 2019, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html.

series of programs that included Williams's granddaughter and other experts on Williams's work to support preservation efforts.[372] The L.A. City Council unanimously approved the nomination in February 2022.[373] A year later, in February 2023, the home was purchased by Curt Bouton and architect John Arnold with plans to fully rehabilitate the property. As the Los Angeles Conservancy argues, the historical designation and effort to restore the home "illustrates a part of Paul Revere Williams' life and story that is rarely told or fully understood. In telling the full story about people and places, it is important to preserve this house as a physical reminder of what Williams achieved and his extraordinary career in architecture."[374]

Meanwhile, just a few years ago, on the other side of the city in Westwood, CO Architects began restoration of the lobby of the La Kretz Botany Building at the University of California, Los Angeles, which was designed in 1957 by Williams's firm – the first commission granted solely to his firm by a prominent institution.[375] Examining the hand-drafted architectural renderings retained by the university, CO realized that Williams had originally planned a glass mosaic depicting whimsical plant forms that emerge from the ground and jubilantly welcome students into the building. It is not known why the mosaic was not installed. Because the rendering did not provide color notations for the tesserae, CO identified period correct colors by looking to the famous banana-leaf wallpaper Williams and interior designers Paul László, John Luccareni, and

[372] Los Angeles Conservancy, https://www.laconservancy.org/issues/paul-revere-williams-house

[373] Los Angeles City Council meeting February 16, 2022, https://lacity.primegov.com/Portal/MeetingPreview?compiledMeetingDocumentFileId=22358.

[374] Los Angeles Conservancy, https://www.laconservancy.org/issues/paul-revere-williams-house.

[375] Lois Lee, "Paul R. Williams – Designed Mosaic Realized at UCLA 60 Years Later," *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, Preservation Leadership Forum Blog, April 1, 2021, https://forum.savingplaces.org/blogs/special-contributor/2021/04/01/paul-r-williams-designed-mosaic-realized-at-ucla.

Harriet Shellenbergerin created in the 1940s[376] (and that remains) for the Lanai Room and Fountain Coffee Room of the Beverly Hills Hotel, just a few miles away. The newly realized mosaic is a showstopper! Further, as Lois Lee notes in her report on the completion of the project, "Williams aimed to make the gardens an integral part of the building's design by placing ribbon windows along the south facade and implementing a 'sight-seers' deck' that physically overlooks the tree canopies." Honoring those plans, CO made gentle improvements to the original design that open the space up further and allow unobstructed sight lines to the garden outside. The final step in their work was to place a plaque about Paul R. Williams on the front of the building.

Williams's communities of remembrance continue to work.

[376] Lois Lee, "Paul R. Williams – Designed Mosaic Realized at UCLA 60 Years Later," *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, Preservation Leadership Forum Blog, April 1, 2021, https://forum.savingplaces.org/blogs/special-contributor/2021/04/01/paul-r-williams-designed-mosaic-realized-at-ucla.

Epilogue

Returning to the 1963 *Ebony* photograph of Williams at his drawing table pointing to a rendering (Fig. 2), the viewer finds the architect held in the act of creating. Like Judith Leyster, he both pauses in his work and points to his work, then creates a *sight line* with the viewer with which he advances an appeal. The photo of Williams works firstly to affirm his humanity, but foremostly argues that the architect deserves a place in the world. While this phrasing is general, Williams's notion of "place" was specific. He points to a rendering of *site*, by his own hand, of a Mercedes Benz dealership while he is surrounded by the tools of his professional work. In doing so, Williams qualifies the space he desires through an aspirational gesture, arguing that he is deserving of a place that has been demarcated as white and therefore "better."

If the viewer spends time with the image, they might also see Williams's *citation* of Frederick Douglass's occupation photographs. Through the visual connection to Douglass's work as an abolitionist speaker and early visual theorist, the photograph of Williams begins to convey a fuller spectrum of being and worth. As he argues in the "I Am a Negro" essay and through his work as an architect, Williams is an individual deserving of a home. From the claim, the viewer might see an equation unfold: white space = home ownership = citizenship. One can read the equation from left to right, as well as from right to left. By doing so, the viewer might feel the creep of Black social death – Williams is blocked from entering the equation.

As the viewer watches the photo and registers its claims, they are asked to do something. The space of appearance has been activated, and the viewer of Williams's photograph must determine

a response to its appeals. A likely beginning is to search for other images and texts of and by the architect to confirm and/or find other iterations of the message. Using the *sights* cubed formula when looking at a sequence of photos while reading texts that both parasitically attach themselves to the images and flow along with them, the political nature of Williams's troubling is illuminated. To be direct, Williams troubles the racial bias that questions his ability to be a professional, let alone sustain a practice in architecture in white spaces for white clients. By proving his abilities and daring to record them through the occupation photo, Williams's further troubles racism by finding a way to physically inhabit the spaces that laws and restrictive codes have barred him from inhabiting.

The photographs do not always overtly document this work, but they establish *sight lines* that guide the viewer's eye and mind to the breaks and ruptures in the system that have yet to be recognized and heard. When photographed with white clients, or within the spaces white clients inhabit, Williams politically troubles the very concept of "white space" daring to imagine and embody otherwise possibilities. In occupation photographs, Williams reveals *what* he is – "a Negro" – while the texts that he writes work to describe *who* he is – an individual. As Roland Barthes remarks, "Every photograph is a certificate of presence."[377] In his occupation portraits, Williams is a Black man standing in white space, and the world does not fall apart, but white supremacy is certainly questioned. When photographed with Black clients, the appeal is fortified, as the photographs of Williams work in concert to demonstrate and reveal other systems in operation that press against, poke, and prod racism – racial covenants, segregation practices, state-sanctioned violence against Black people, and anti-Black rhetoric.

[377] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 87.

Azoulay cautions the viewer that

> the photo acts, thus making others act. The ways in which its action yields others' action, however, is unpredictable. In addition to noting this indeterminacy, which is oriented toward the future, Arendt describes action in terms of over determination when she contends that action is irreversible. The deed cannot be undone. Photography is bound to this description: The image inscribed within it cannot be undone. But as Arendt further argues, the action depends on other's actions, and as a result of this plurality, it will never reach its goal.[378]

As Benjamin also warns, "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably."[379] However, having captured the past and heard its appeals within the public space of appearance that is activated through the civil contract of photography, the viewer is called upon to remember that Williams, like Frederick Douglass, relates his humanity to his work. Consequently, both men form a sense of subjecthood via the photograph – finding as Arendt theorizes that one's humanity can be signaled through similarity to other men (*plurality*), while identity cannot be articulated through labor nor work.[380] Thus, to declare their citizenship in both the civil space of photography and the United States, Douglass and Williams seize upon the fixity and longevity of the photographic image.

When/if the viewer determines to act in response, they join (sometimes found) a community of remembrance (sometimes communities). As this dissertation has demonstrated, communities of

[378] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 137-138.

[379] Walter Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (Boston: Mariner Books, 2019), 198.

[380] Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, (University of Chicago Press, 1958), 41.

remembrance might take up many kinds of work: myth making, record keeping, preservation, art making, theorizing, and memorializing are among the important acts that they might engage. In each of these acts, the communities of remembrance animate the photographic subject's claims and appeals in the present. But as Azoulay advises, "within this space, the point of departure for our mutual relations cannot be empathy or mercy. It must be a covenant for the rehabilitation of their citizenship in the political sphere within which we are all ruled."[381]

Natality Against Mortality

Famously, after his mother's death, Roland Barthes is prompted to search for a childhood photo of her that he remembers but cannot find. In *Camera Lucida* (1981), Barthes writes from an interior perspective, suggesting in the outlay and pace of the text that the reader and writer are viewing fleeting images through a camera obscura, which is the predecessor to the analog camera. But this is the first of many tricks that the text plays, for it is impossible to be inside a camera lucida as one is typically comprised of a crystal or mirror that allows users to see a subject while simultaneously drawing what they see on a piece of paper. Instead, the reader must remember that the title indicates that the reader is partaking in reflections on photography rather than viewing the projections one might see inside a room-sized obscura.

Barthes notes that "the same century invented History and Photography," but explains that "History is a memory fabricated according to positive formulas, a pure intellectual discourse

[381] Ariella Azoulay, *The Civil Contract of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (New York: Zone Books, 2008), 17.

which abolishes mythic Time."[382] Barthes is concerned with the paradox of photography's transitory nature against its ability to transgress the context of its making, writing that "the Photograph is a certain but fugitive testimony; so that everything, today, prepares our race for this impotence: to be no longer able to conceive *duration*, affectively or symbolically."[383] Seeing a photo of Williams in his office made in 1952 threatens to erase the context in which the photo was made, by randomly pushing the subject's appeal into the current moment where viewers may quite likely be ill prepared to receive the photos appeal. Frank B. Wilderson finds the notion of time to be inherently mythic, arguing,

> Foundational to the cognitive maps of radical politics is the belief that all sentient begins can be protagonists within a (political or personal) narrative; that every sentient being arrives with a history. This belief is underwritten by another idea that constitutes narrative: that all sentient beings can be redeemed. History and redemption are the weave of narrative. As provocative as it may sound, history and redemption (and therefore narrative itself) are inherently anti-Black.[384]

Karen E. Hudson's work as chronicler of her grandfather's professional achievements began just as Barthes published *Camera Lucida* in mourning of his mother. Upon the death of their loved ones, both authors participate in a common mourning activity – they looked for, looked at, and looked through photographs. However, where Hudson works to keep her grandfather's legacy

[382] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 93.

[383] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 93.

[384] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 226.

active and to re-animate an interest in his creative production as an architect, Barthes withholds his mother, turning inward as he deliberates on photographic meaning.

Barthes's traces the path of his research, which unfolds as a melancholy shuffling through photos of his mother in reverse, from just before her death to the earliest images of her as an infant,[385] intermixed with considerations of what the photograph is. Barthes begins with an explanation: "I was overcome by an 'ontological' desire: I wanted to learn at all costs what Photography was 'in itself,' by what essential feature it was to be distinguished from the community of images."[386] Barthes declares, "I wasn't sure that Photography existed."[387] Photography as a research subject seems to be transposed with his mother as a lost subject. Longingly, as Barthes looks for the image of his mother, he surmises that he is searching for his mother's essence – "the Winter Garden Photograph was indeed essential, it achieved for me, utopically, *the impossible science of the unique being*"[388] – a coy gesture that harkens to the essay's start.

When Barthes climactically finds the image of his mother he declares, "There she is! She's really there! At last, there she is!" However, at this moment of rediscovery Barthes writes, "I cannot reproduce the Winter Garden photograph. It exists only for me."[389] In this gesture, the reader is made to feel something of the loss Barthes's feels upon his mother's death. Barthes writes, "from

---

[385] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 67.
[386] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 3.
[387] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 3.
[388] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 71.
[389] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 73.

now on I could do no more than await my total, undialectical death. That is what I read in the Winter Garden Photograph."[390]

Although Barthes's text is supposed to be about his mother, it is decidedly not about his life with her, nor her maternal experience. In fact, he refuses birth obstinately, even infantilizing his mother to occlude any image of his own birth: "During her illness, I nursed her, held the bowl of tea she liked because it was easier to drink from than from a cup; she had become my little girl, uniting for me with that essential child she was in her first photograph."[391] In the ontological condition of being a material that is present *during*, as well as the record *of* an event, the photograph is "literally an emanation of the referent,"[392] for Barthes connecting the past with the present, and thus, memorializing the photographic subject. As art historian and semiotician Kaja Silverman explains, "the photograph involves temporal remoteness, but spatial proximity. It brings its referent before us, but only in the guise of what once was."[393] Barthes declares, "each photograph always contains this imperious sign of my future death that each one, however attached it seems to be to the excited world of the living, challenges each of us, one by one, outside of any generality (but not outside of any transcendence)."[394] Accusingly, he declares, "all these young photographers who are at work in the world, determined upon the capture of actuality, do not know that they are agents of Death.'[395]

[390] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 72.
[391] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 72.
[392] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 80
[393] Kaja Silverman, *Threshold of the Visible World,* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 101.
[394] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 97.
[395] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 92.

While scholars have expounded upon the Winter Garden Photograph, Barthes loses track of a second photograph in *Camera Lucida* which is given much less attention – a photograph he

> remember[s] keeping for a long time a photograph I had cut out of a magazine – lost subsequently, like everything too carefully put away – which showed a slave market: the slave master, in a hat, standing: the slaves, in loincloths, sitting. I repeat: a photograph, not a drawing or engraving; for my horror and my fascination as a child came from this: that there was a *certainty* that such a thing had existed: not a question of exactitude, but of reality: the historian was no longer the mediator, slavery was given without mediation, the fact was established *without method*.[396]

To describe a concept that is key to the essay, the *punctum* – that detail that pricks the viewer's gaze[397] – Barthes repeatedly returns to a photograph by Harlem Renaissance photographer James Van der Zee of his family in 1926, which Barthes captions "The Strapped Pumps." Similarly, he lingers over an 1882 photograph by Nadar of French colonizer Savorgnan de Brazza "between two young blacks dressed as French sailors; one of the two boys, oddly, has rested his hand on Brazza's thigh."[398] Barthes also makes sweeping comments about a 1963 Richard Avedon image depicting William Casby, who was "born a slave," of which Barthes asserts, "the essence of slavery is here laid bare."[399] Finally, Barthes mentions a second photograph by Avedon of civil

[396] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 80.

[397] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 47.

[398] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 51.

[399] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 34-35.

rights activist and union organizer, A. Phillip Randolph made in 1976, simply to reflect (again) on death, which leads him back to his mother, and then to himself.

As cultural theorist Fred Moten strikingly details in his own consideration of the reverberations and work of the 1955 photograph of 14-year-old Emmett Till's brutalized body that his mother granted permission to be made and published in *Jet* magazine, "blackness and maternity play huge roles in the analytic of photography Roland Barthes lays down in *Camera Lucida*."[400] Moten responds to this connection pointedly when he writes, "It is in the interest of a certain defeat or at least deconstruction of death, a resurrective or (second) reconstructive improvisation through death's pride and through a culture that, as Baraka points out in a recent poem, 'believe[s] everything is better/Dead. And that everything alive/is [its] enemy.'"[401] Further, Moten criticizes Barthes, who "wasn't trying to hear the sound of that display, the sound of the photograph's illumination of facticity that holds an affirmation not of, but *out of* death."[402]

Barthes's withholding of the Winter Garden Photograph is the subject of great frustration amongst photo theorists, and critical texts continue to tease through the influential essay from various perspectives. As Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski explain, "scholars have long debated the existence of the Winter Garden Photograph, the impossible image that captures his mother's essence, and that Barthes, mourning her death, refuses to reproduce."[403]

---

[400] Fred Moten, "Visible Music," In *In the Break*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 202.
[401] Fred Moten, "Visible Music," In *In the Break*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 209.
[402] Fred Moten, "Visible Music," In *In the Break*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 209.
[403] Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski, ed. "Introduction" In *The Optical Unconscious*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 23.

Less often referenced is a moment in *Camera Lucida* in which Barthes identifies four states of being, or "forces" that operate within the portrait.

> The portrait-photograph is a closed field of forces. Four image-repertoires intersect here, oppose and distort each other. In front of the lens, I am at the same time: the one I think I am, the one I want others to think I am, the one the photographer thinks I am, and the one he makes use of to exhibit his art."[404]

To explain the dynamic, Barthes places himself in the subject position, a move that he makes over and over in the text as all referents ultimately are very personal and relate back to him – even when he is describing a Black family photographed during the Harlem Renaissance, "The Strapped Pumps." As Silverman explains in relation to the concept of the punctum,

> Barthes suggests that to embed a detail in this kind of associational matrix is to confer new significance upon it–to illuminate it with a little 'star.' His text bears out this contention. Over and over again, *Camera Lucida* succeeds in irradiating otherwise insignificant–or even culturally devalued – details in photographs which Barthes studies with a keen, remembering eye.[405]

Although not the center of his aims and not cited directly, I propose that Barthes is responding to (at the very least, demonstrating the influence of) Arendt's *vita activa* in *Camera Lucida*. Where Arendt resoundingly arrives at *natality*, as in a mirror's reflection, Barthes returns to death over

[404] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 13.

[405] Barthes likens the punctum to a star in, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 49. Kaja Silverman, *Threshold of the Visible World,* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 183.

and again. By the time he withholds the Winter Garden Photograph, Barthes has identified three important practices or intentions inherent in every photograph, the Operator (photographer), the Spectator (viewer), and the Spectrum (the given-to-be-seen, according to Silverman[406]):

> to do, to undergo, to look. The Operator is the Photographer. The Spectator is ourselves, all of us who glance through collections of photographs-in magazines and newspapers, in books, albums archives . . . And the person or thing photographed is the target, the referent, a kind of little simulacrum, any eidolon emitted by the object, which I should like to call the Spectrum of the Photograph, because this word retains, through its root, a relation to 'spectacle' and adds to it that rather terrible thing which is there in every photograph: the return of the dead.[407]

These intentions might also be understood as verbs – to photograph, to view, and to pose. In other words, Barthes articulates three ways in which to act with the optical device. Relating this to his image repertoire, the photographer photographs (the one the photographer thinks I am), viewers view (the one I want others to think I am), and the subject poses (the one I think I am). He even considers the condition of not being, which Barthes argues is the position that holds the most power, writing, "The 'private life' is nothing but that zone of space, of time, where I am not an image, an object. It is my *political* right to be a subject which I must protect.)"[408] But who is the fourth position (the one the photographer makes use of to exhibit his art)?

---

[406] Kaja Silverman, *Threshold of the Visible World,* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 181.

[407] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 9.

[408] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 15.

While a great deal of invigorating postcolonial analysis has been devoted to Barthes's essay, it is used here to return the reader to the beginning. Azoulay's criticism of the importance offered to the photographer's gaze, and her call for a new user's manual for photography, is centered squarely against the omnipotence that Barthes exhibits in *Camera Lucida*. Barthes writes with unquestioned authority and has been taken up by scholars to such an extent that his thinking on photography has pervaded thinking on photography in the Global North. As Azoulay explains, "[Arendt] reviles those who act as if they were the creators of the world and who seek to fashion it in their own image instead of acting in the world together with others who contribute jointly toward shaping it."[409] In a footnote that extends nearly two pages, Moten acknowledges Silverman's analysis (and thanks David Eng for pointing it out to him) adding,

> the refusal or inability to displace the sovereign ego is not only a failure to realign self and other but a failure to realign the individual and the collective, so that the repression of difference is also the repression of a certain ensemble publicity that is activated in and as sound, where sound is irreducible to voice, and thus, to the meanings that comprise dominant culture and knowledge.[410]

Laura Wexler also responds to *Camera Lucida*, convincingly arguing that "Barthes played the *fort-da* game with slavery itself and kept a fuller sense of complicity at bay"[411] by diverting the reader's attention to other photographs printed and "read" in the text, that nonetheless, the reader

[409] Ariella Azoulay, Civil Imagination*: A Political Ontology of Photography*, trans. Louise Bethlehem (London: Verso, 2012), 138.

[410] Fred Moten, "Visible Music," In *In the Break*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 291, n59.

[411] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation" in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 32.

eventually realizes, implicate, or relate to the author. For example, the first photograph that Barthes mentions is an image of "Napoleon's youngest brother, Jerome, taken in 1852."[412] The first photograph that is published within the text is Alfred Stieglitz's, *The Horse-Car Terminal, New York*, 1893, the year that Barthes's mother was born.[413] Surprisingly, as Wexler asserts, and Shawn Michelle Smith agrees with Barthesian scholar, Diana Knight,[414] Barthes does indeed publish the Winter Garden Photograph, titling it *The Stock* – as in the root to the family tree, which Barthes's grandfather represents, and Barthes obscures.[415] Barthes tells readers that the Winter Garden Photograph depicts his mother with her older brother and father, suggesting without explicitly articulating an imperial link to Barthes's grandfather.[416] On the page just before (behind) the reprinted photo, Barthes explains, "but more insidious, more penetrating than likeness: the Photograph sometimes makes appear what we never see in a real face (or in a face reflected in a mirror): a genetic feature, the fragment of oneself or of a relative which comes from some ancestor."[417] Wexler argues that the diversion tactic amounts to a kind of mental occlusion[418] that allows Barthes to avoid considering his own family's participation in French colonization of Africa.[419]

---

[412] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980), trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 3.

[413] She was coincidentally a year older than Paul R. Williams, but the reader must calculate these details on their own.

[414] Shawn Michelle Smith, "Race and Reproduction in Camera Lucida,'" In *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2013), 12n, 224.

[415] Kaja Silverman, *Threshold of the Visible World,* (New York: Routledge, 1996),

[416] Laura Wexler identifies Olin as the originator of this theory Laura Wexler, "The Purloined Image," In Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski, ed. *The Optical Unconscious*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017).; Olin, Margaret. "Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes's 'Mistaken' Identification." *Representations* 80, no. 1 (2002): 99–118. https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2002.80.1.99.

[417] Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (New York: The Noonday Press, 1981), 103.

[418] This is a reference to Ann Stoler's *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*, (Durham: Duke University, 2016) which is an impressive consideration of many facets of the ways in which imperialism continues to reverberate in the present.

[419] As Wexler outlines, Barthes's father died in WWI before he was a year old. He was raised by his mother, Henriette Barthes, his aunt, and grandmother. He would live with his mother his entire life. Laura Wexler, "The

In an essay that significantly informed this dissertation's approach, considering Frederick Douglass's lectures on photography, Laura Wexler identifies a conduit of meaning that Barthes's essay overlooks: the *revenant*, the "one who returns from the dead"[420] – the fourth position that he overlooks in his famous triad (the one he uses to make his art). Wexler finds Douglass arguing in his speeches on photography that photographs have the capacity to shed "the melancholy fixation on death and loss with which Barthes has taught us to imbue it,"[421] a problem that Azoulay also works against. By arguing a refusal of this coupling, Wexler finds "that the formerly enslaved could reverse the social death that defined slavery with another objectifying flash: this time creating a positive image of the social life of freedom and proving that African American consciousness had been there all along."[422]

The potential in the proposed possibility of reversing social death connects securely with Arendt's interest in natality, and the polis as the site in which one declares their individuality. The inherent agreement at the site of the polis, as one stands in the space of appearance, is that one also agrees to act in plurality – together – towards the common good. When Moten describes the energy of mourning as generative, he too is arguing in favor of the collective, articulating with love the great beauty that can be found in the lives of folks such as Paul R. Williams:

Purloined Image," In Shawn Michelle Smith and Sharon Sliwinski, ed. *The Optical Unconscious*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 2017), 271-274.

[420] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation" in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 19.

[421] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation" in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 20.

[422] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation" in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 19-20.

> Black Art, which is to say Black Life, which is to say Black (Life Against) Death, which is to say Black Eros, is the ongoing production of a performance, the ongoing production of a performance: rupture and collision, augmented toward singularity . . . The ways black mo'nin' improvises through the opposition of mourning and melancholia, disrupts the temporal framework that buttresses that opposition such that an extended, lingering look at – aesthetic response to – the photograph manifests itself as political action. Is the display of the picture melancholic? No, but it's certainly no simple release or mourning either. Mo'nin' improvises through that difference. You have to keep looking at this so you can listen to it.[423]

Karen E. Hudson engages in the same mourning ritual as Barthes after her grandfather's death. Having been alerted to Williams's achievements at his funeral, she sets out to find his essence through photographic and textual representations. Where Barthes avoids his family's legacy in *Camera Lucida*, Hudson does not intentionally play tricks on the reader, and acts with capacious generosity to share her grandfather's experience and achievements with others. Nevertheless, as this dissertation has argued, she engages in myth making to restore and insure his legacy – his public memory. Where Barthes's mother remains stagnant in the Winter Garden Photograph, in Douglass's speeches on photography Wexler finds Douglass activating the concept of the *revenant*, which she argues "belongs as much to the future as to the past," as "a political concept, [that asserts] the appropriation and resignification of a scientific technology to serve the ends of

[423] Fred Moten, "Visible Music," In *In the Break*, (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 209-210.

freedom."[424] This dissertation has argued that the revenant can also be found in Williams's occupation photos, especially as they are used in Hudson's books, with a remembering eye.

In the front matter to *Afropessimism*, Fred Moten declares "the persistence of thinking such as Wilderson's teaches us to believe in the miraculous even as we decry the brutalities out of which miracles emerge." I wholly agree and can turn to Afropessimism in this epilogue because of the quality of the miraculous upon which Wilderson's exposition rests. The text beautifully interweaves personal memoir with difficult theory, circling several times, closer and closer to love, ending with his mother's death and a son's expression of love in the middle of deep loss.

Yet, I have pointedly turned away from this lens in analyzing Williams's work in occupation photographs because of the depth of despair the approach both emerges from and demands. Wilderson acknowledges this difficulty when describing an encounter with a Black student attending his office hours who also expressed the need to turn away from the despair that Afropessimism rests in. Wilderson confided to the student, "the thing that prevent[s] most students from getting their heads around Afropressimism [i]s the fact that it describe[s] a structural problem but offer[s] no structural solution to that problem."[425] Sparring with his academic mother, Wilderson explained that most people are "too afraid" to "take the time to understand" the theoretical lens because "everyone is complicit" in the problem of Black suffering and "no sentence can be written that would explain how to remedy it."[426] Wilderson

[424] Laura Wexler, "'A More Perfect Likeness': Frederick Douglass and the Image of the Nation" in Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed., *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 33.

[425] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 331.

[426] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 328 - 329.

further contends, that "a suffering without a solution is a hard thing to hold, especially if that suffering fuels the psychic health of the rest of the world."[427]

Yet Orlando Patterson, who's *Slavery and Social Death* (2018) is a key text for Afropessimists, argues against the lens describing Afropessimism as an outgrowth of the very credible despair of our current moment that is itself enmeshed in Black American history.[428] However, Patterson explains,

> I don't think we're in a situation of social death, because one of the elements of social death is that you're not recognized as an integral member of the civic community, the public sphere, and we certainly are, on the political and cultural levels. And we're very integrated in the military, which is the quintessence of what defines who belongs. The Afro-pessimists are right, though, to point to persisting segregation in the private sphere.[429]

Azoulay provides that the civil contract of photography is a point of rupture where the Black subject can be seen and heard if the viewer agrees to participate in the civil contract of photography. As a scholar, I hope to have fulfilled this contract honorably.

Like Taylor, Patterson encourages that the way forward is for the state to continue to attend to Black poverty, segregation, and other forms of inequality, even if its attempts thus far cannot be described as successful, urging that integration, education and good jobs are needed to build the

[427] Frank B. Wilderson III, *Afropessimism* (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2020), 329.
[428] Liz Mineo, "The Kerner Report on race, 50 years on," *The Harvard Gazette*, March 21, 2018, https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/03/harvard-professor-reflects-on-the-kerner-report-50-years-on/.
[429] Liz Mineo, "The Kerner Report on race, 50 years on," *The Harvard Gazette*, March 21, 2018, https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/03/harvard-professor-reflects-on-the-kerner-report-50-years-on/.

social subject.[430] And it is here that Arendt's *polis* and Wexler's *revenant* converge to shine luminous. The Greeks saw education as being a vital component of building the citizen – one had to be educated to participate in debate and take on the act of voting with responsibility. While education in the Greek world was highly segregated and selective, it was also understood as both a public and a private endeavor. In his determined quest to train as an architect through all available forms of educations (public and private), as well as through self-fashioning as an exceptional individual, his insistent appearance in white spaces, and the use of occupation photographs to trouble racism, Paul R. Williams used the shaping of domestic space to activate the space of appearance. His work continues to be watched and responded to by viewers of his photos. Utilizing the *sights* cubed formula, this dissertation argues that in this way, the appeals that Williams made through his occupation photographs have found a miraculous way *out* of death.

Returning with a Remembering Eye

It is difficult for this author to recall the first time I came across a building designed by Paul R. Williams, but I have a sense that I have been encountering his work through most of my life. Born and raised in the San Gabriel Valley, on frequent trips to Los Angeles as a teenager I often saw, and experienced buildings designed by Williams without knowing his identity. I do recall first learning of him through a real estate advertisement about 2018 posted on YouTube and circulating through my social media feeds advertising the sale of a Paul R. Williams midcentury modern home constructed in 1948 on Sixth Street in Ontario for Dr. Robert Norman Williams,

[430] Liz Mineo, "The Kerner Report on race, 50 years on," *The Harvard Gazette*, March 21, 2018, https://news.harvard.edu/gazette/story/2018/03/harvard-professor-reflects-on-the-kerner-report-50-years-on/.

just a few blocks away from my own home (Fig. 16). As well, while conducting research on WPA murals in my region, I learned that the city of Ontario's first post office (1926)[431] was designed by none other than Paul R. Williams (Fig. 17).[432]

The first time I saw a photograph of the architect was while viewing *Hollywood's Architect: The Paul R. Williams Story* (2020)[433] on my local PBS station. With great excitement, as I watched, I connected so many personally significant places to the architect – the Superior Court of California, Stanley Mosk Courthouse (1958), where my husband worked for three years, and the adjacent Kenneth Hahn Hall of Administration (1960); the Al Jolsen Shrine (1941) at Hillside Memorial Park that I recall visiting as a child (though, I often wonder if this is an invented memory, as I can't figure out the circumstances of my visit); I will always remember watching on TV the tragic explosion of unrest in 1992 after the killing of Latasha Harlins (just a couple years my junior) and the acquittal of LAPD officers after the brutal recorded (and endlessly repeated broadcast) beating of motorist Rodney King and seeing the Golden State Mutual Life Insurance building (1949) and Broadway Federal Savings & Loan (1955) stood witness to so many unheard voices; the elliptical Founder's Church of Religious Science (1960) on West Sixth Street in Los Angeles that always seemed to be along any sojourn I took to L.A. with friends; and the 28th Street YMCA (1926) that I have always slowed to look at to catch a glimpse of the

[431] "U.S. Post Office, Ontario, CA" Paul Revere Williams Project, https://www.paulrwilliamsproject.org/index.html.1.150.html.

[432] The city of Ontario was established by Canadian emigres George and William Chaffey and incorporated in 1891. As part of their vision for the "Model Colony," the Chaffey brothers founded The Chaffey College of Agriculture in 1885. The school was operated by the University of Southern California until residents voted to take local control in 1901. This tangential connection with Williams may account for the architect's interest in the development bid.

[433] Royal Kennedy Rogers, *Hollywood's Architect: The Paul R. Williams Story*, directed and produced by Royal Kennedy Rodgers and Kathy McCampbell Vance, (February 6, 2020; Los Angeles: PBS So Cal), https://www.pbs.org/video/hollywoods-architect-3prwsa/.

Frederick Douglass bas relief on the way to an art museum. My interest piqued, as I began to search for more information on Williams, I noticed that he was often introduced with the story of him learning to draw upside down to avoid making his white clients uncomfortable. This story agitated my sense of injustice, and photographic images of Williams with white clients spurred me to act.

When the Getty Research Institute announced in 2020 that it had acquired Williams's papers, renderings, photographs, and existing records, I began to browse through images of Paul R. Williams in books and online. It struck me almost immediately that in these photos, Williams was magnanimously performing the role of architect while simultaneously negotiating the fraught terrain of racism and citizenship in the United States. As this dissertation has shown, reading Williams's "I Am a Negro" (1937) essay was a watershed moment for my research. Reading Azoulay and Arendt made Williams's work clear.

It has been my honor to join in Williams's work and become a part of his community of remembrance.

Bibliography

"1619 Project." New York Times. August 14, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/1619-america-slavery.html.

"A Good Architect," Editorials, *The Crisis*, September 1937, 273. https://babel.hathitrust.org/cgi/pt?id=mdp.39015010213083&view=1up&seq=586&size=175.

Angus, Siobhan. "Mining the History of Photography," in *Capitalism and the Camera: Essays on Photography and Extraction*, ed. Kevin Coleman and Daniel James, London: Verso, 2021, 55-73.

Arendt, Hannah. *The Human Condition*. The University of Chicago Press, 1958.

Arendt, Hannah. *On Violence*. New York: Harvest Books, 1970.

Arendt, Hannah. "What Is Freedom?" in *The Portable Hannah Arendt*, Edited by Peter Baehr. New York: Penguin Books, 2000, 438-461.

Arendt, Hannah. "The Social Question," in The Portable Hannah Arendt, Edited by Peter Baehr. New York: Penguin Books, 2000, 247-277.

Associated Press, "Ebony and Jet magazines' photo archive will go to Smithsonian." *NBC News* (Los Angeles, CA), July 26, 2019. Accessed November 30, 2022. https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/ebony-jet-magazines-photo-archive-will-go-smithsonian-n1034851.

Azoulay, Ariella. *The Civil Contract of Photography*. Translated by Rela Mazali and Ruvik Danieli. New York: Zone Books, 2008.

Azoulay, Ariella. *Civil Imagination: A Political Ontology of Photography*. Translated by Louise Bethlehem. London: Verso, 2012.

Azoulay, Ariella Aïsha. *Potential History: Unlearning Imperialism*. London: Verso, 2019.

Baldwin, James. *The Devil Finds Work* (1976). New York: Vintage Books, 2011.

Baldwin, James. *Notes of a Native Son* (1955). Boston: Beacon Press, 2012.

Baldwin, James and Raoul Peck. *I Am Not Your Negro*. Directed by Raoul Peck. Magnolia Pictures Amazon Prime Video, 2016. https://www.amazon.com/I-Am-Not-Your-Negro/dp/B01MR52U7T.

Barthes, Roland. Translated by Richard Howard. *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography* (1980). New York: The Noonday Press, 1981.

Roland Barthes, “Electoral Photogeny,” in *Mythologies* (1957). Translated by Richard Howard. New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Straus, and Giroux, 2013.

Roland Barthes, “The Photographic Message,” in *IMAGE – MUSIC – TEXT*. Translated by Stephen Heath. New York: Hill and Wang, a division of Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 1977.

Bates, Karen Grisby and Melissa Block. “A Trailblazing Black Architect Who Helped Shape L.A.,” All Things Considered, *NPR*, June 22, 2012. Accessed September 23, 2022. https://www.npr.org/2012/06/22/155442524/a-trailblazing-black-architect-who-helped-shape-l-a.

Bates, Karen Grisby.“He Was (and Is) The Architect to the Stars.” *New York Times*, July 26, 1990. https://www.nytimes.com/1990/07/26/garden/he-was-and-is-the-architect-to-the-stars.html?searchResultPosition=4.

Beckman, Karen and Jean Ma, ed. *Still Moving: Between Cinema and Photography*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2008.

Bengali, Shashank. “Williams the Conqueror.” *Trojan Family Magazine*, (Los Angeles, CA), Spring 2004. https://web.archive.org/web/20130527154825/http://www.usc.edu/dept/pubrel/trojan_family/spring04/williams1.html.

Benjamin, Walter. “Little History of Photography” (1931) in *Selected Writings*, Volume 2 1927 - 1934. Translated by Rodney Livingstone and others, Edited by Michael W. Jennings, Howard Eiland, and Gary Smith. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 1999.

Berger, John. “Uses of Photography: For Susan Sontag,” in *About Looking*. New York: Pantheon Books, 1980.

Bombay, Scott. “The story behind the Frederick Douglass birthday celebration.” *National Constitution Center* (blog). February 14, 2023. https://constitutioncenter.org/blog/the-story-behind-the-frederick-douglass-birthday-celebration.

“Bridget ‘Biddy’ Mason,” *National Park Service*. Last updated February 7, 2021. https://www.nps.gov/people/biddymason.htm.

Broome, Katherine. “Annotated Bibliography.” *Paul Revere Williams Project*. Edited and compiled by Deborah W. Brackstone. Art Museum of the University of Memphis, 2015. https://www.paulrwilliamsproject.org/Paul%20R%20Williams%20Project%20An%20Annotated%20Bibliography.pdf.

Budds, Diana. “The Overlooked Legacy of American Architect Paul Revere Williams.” *The Weekly Challenger*. December 15, 2016. http://theweeklychallenger.com/the-overlooked-legacy-of-pioneering-african-american-architect-paul-revere-williams/.

Caciato, Maristella and LeRonn P. Brooks. "The Architect Who Designed L.A. Landmarks While Fighting Segregation." *Getty*. July 21, 2021. https://www.getty.edu/news/the-architect-who-designed-la-landmarks-while-fighting-segregation/.

Channick, Robert. "Ebony photo archives sold for $30M, with plan to donate collection to Smithsonian and other museums to ensure public access." *Chicago Tribune*. July 25, 2019. https://www.chicagotribune.com/business/ct-biz-getty-buys-ebony-photo-archives-auction-20190725-apybak65fjb6ldycv7y2wsshru-story.html.

Coates, Ta-Nehisi. "The Case for Reparations." *The Atlantic*. June 2014. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2014/06/the-case-for-reparations/361631/.

"Designer For Living: America's Ace Architect Paul Williams Attains Fame and Fortune Blueprinting Stately Mansions." *Ebony Magazine Archive*. February 1, 19461. https://search-ebscohost-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=ear&AN=138721470&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Doane, Mary Ann. *Bigger Than Life: The Close-Up and Scale in the Cinema*. Durham: Duke University Pres, 2021.

Douglass, Frederick. "Age of Pictures." In *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American*, 142-160. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015.

Douglass, Frederick. "Country, Conscience, and the Anti-Slavery Cause: An Address Delivered in New York, New York, May 11, 1847." *New York Daily Tribune*, May 13, 1847. Edited by Blassingame, John et al. The Frederick Douglass Papers: Series One – Speeches, Debates, and Interviews. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979. Vol. II, p. 57. In "Country, Conscience, and the Anti-Slavery Cause." *Yale MacMillan Center: Gilder Lehrman Center for the Study of Slavery, Resistance, and Abolition*. https://glc.yale.edu/country-conscience-and-anti-slavery-cause.

Douglass, Frederick. "Lecture on Pictures." In *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American*, 126-141. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015.

Douglass, Frederick. *The Life and Times of Frederick Douglass* revised edition. Boston: De Wolfe & Fiske, Co, 1892.

Douglass, Frederick. *Narrative of the Life of Frederick Douglass, An American Slave* (1845). New York: Signet Classics, 2005.

Douglass, Frederick. "Pictures and Progress." In *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American*, 161-173. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015.

Douglass, Frederick. *"Self-Made Men." Undated. Address before the students of the Indian Industrial School, Carlisle, PA. Frederick Douglass Papers: Speech, Article, and Book File, -1894; Library of Congress, Washington D.C.* https://www.loc.gov/item/mss1187900540/.

Du Bois, W. E. B. *Black Reconstruction in America 1860 – 1880* (1935). New York: The Free Press, 1998.

"E.L. Cord Residence, Beverly Hills." *Paul Revere Williams Project*. Edited and compiled by Deborah W. Brackstone. Art Museum of the University of Memphis, 2015. https://www.paulrwilliamsproject.org/index.html.1.40.html.

Ellison, Ralph. Prologue to *Invisible Man* (1952). Second Vintage International. New York: Vintage, 1995. https://search-ebscohost-.com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=nlebk&AN=721937&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

"Famed Architect Defied Color Line: Paul R. Williams, One of Busiest Wartime Designers, Shocked Clients into Recognizing Ability." *The Pittsburgh Courier* (Pittsburgh, PA), December 4, 1943. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/famed-architect-defied-color-line/docview/202129068/se-2.

Fay, Jennifer. *Inhospitable World: Cinema in the Time of the Anthropocene*. Oxford University Press, 2018.

Folkart, Burt A. "George Beavers, Jr.; Insurance Firm Founder." *Los Angeles Times*. October 14, 1989. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1989-10-14-mn-101-story.html.

Foucault, Michel. "Society Must Be Defended," *Lectures at the Collège de France 1975-1976* Edited by Arnold I. Davidson. Translated by David Macey. New York: Picador, 2003.

Fox-Amato, Matthew. *Exposing Slavery: Photography, Human Bondage, and the Birth of Modern Visual Politics in America*. Oxford University Press, 2019.

"Frederick Douglass's Original New York Times Obituary from 1895." *New York Times. February 14, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/14/obituaries/frederick-douglass-dead-1895.html?searchResultPosition=4.*

Gebhard, David. "Paul R. Williams and the Los Angeles Scene." In Karen E. Hudson, *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*. 19-29. New York: Rizzoli, 1993.

Gibbons, Andrea. *City of Segregation: 100 Years of Struggle for Housing in Los Angeles*. London: Verso, 2018. Kindle Edition.

Hannah-Jones, Nikole. “Our democracy’s founding ideals were false when they were written. Black Americans have fought to make them true.” *New York Times*. August 14, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/black-history-american-democracy.html.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997.

Hawthorne, Christopher. “For the late L.A. architect Paul R. Williams, national honor overlaps with a bleak anniversary.” *Los Angeles Times*. April 28, 2017. https://www.latimes.com/entertainment/arts/museums/la-et-cm-paul-r-williams-gold-medal-20170428-story.html.

Hawthorne, Christopher. “Paul Revere Williams: From the Center to the Margins and Back Again.” *Architect*. April 2017. https://www.architectmagazine.com/awards/aia-awards/paul-revere-williams-from-the-center-to-the-margins-and-back-again_o.

Henderson, Wesley Howard. “Two Case Studies of African-American Architects' Careers in Los Angeles, 1890-1945: Paul R. Williams, FAIA and James H. Garrott, AIA.” PhD dissertation, University of California, Los Angeles, 1992. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/dissertations-theses/two-case-studies-african-american-architects/docview/303983391/se-2 .

Hill, Ginger. “Rightly Viewed: Theorizations of Self in Frederick Douglass’s Lectures on Pictures.” In *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, 40-82. Edited by Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Hood, Amy. “The Legacy of Paul Revere Williams.” The Getty Research Institute’s *Iris Blog*. June 30, 2020. https://blogs.getty.edu/iris/the-legacy-of-paul-revere-williams/.

hooks, bell. *Black Looks: Race and Representation*. Boston: South End Press, 1992.

Horne, Gerald. *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (1995). Virginia, DaCapo Press, 1997.

Huang, Elisa. “The Legacy of Paul Revere Williams Lives on in L.A.” *Trojan Family*. Autumn 2020. https://news.usc.edu/trojan-family/architect-paul-revere-williams-archive-usc-alumni-getty/.

Hudson, Karen E. *Paul R. Williams, Architect: A Legacy of Style*. New York: Rizzoli, 1993.

Hudson, Karen E. *Paul R. Williams: Classic Hollywood Style*. New York: Rizzoli, 2021. Quoted in “2017 AIA Gold Medal: Paul Revere Williams, FAIA,” *AIA*, https://www.aia.org/showcases/23066-paul-revere-williams-faia.

Hudson, Karen E. *The Will and the Way: Paul R. Williams, Architect*. New York: Rizzoli International, 1994.

Isen, Engin F. *Being Political: Genealogies of Citizenship*. University of Minnesota Press, 2002.

Jackson, Fern Marja. "Freedom Day, 1963: A Lost Interview with James Baldwin." *The New Yorker*. September 22, 2020. https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/freedom-day-1963-a-lost-interview-with-james-baldwin.

Johnson, Lyndon B. "To Fulfill These Rights." Howard University Commencement Address, Washington D.C., June 4, 1965. *The American Presidency Project*, UC Santa Barbara, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/node/241312.

"Judith Leyster, Self-Portrait, c. 1630," *National Gallery of Art*, https://www.nga.gov/collection/art-object-page.37003.html (accessed November 15, 2022).

Lee, Lois. "Paul R. Williams – Designed Mosaic Realized at UCLA 60 Years Later." *National Trust for Historic Preservation*, Preservation Leadership Forum Blog. April 1, 2021, https://forum.savingplaces.org/blogs/special-contributor/2021/04/01/paul-r-williams-designed-mosaic-realized-at-ucla.

Lee, Trymaine. "A vast wealth gap, driven by segregation, redlining, evictions and exclusion separates black and white America." *New York Times*. August 14, 2019. https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2019/08/14/magazine/racial-wealth-gap.html.

Levine, Bettijane. "A Legacy Restored; Undaunted by Racism, Architect Paul R. Williams Left a Lasting Mark on L.A. but Few Knew His Name . . . Until a Granddaughter Understood Her Important Heritage." *Los Angeles Times,* Aug 08, 1999. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/family-album-weekly-profile-history-joys-trials/docview/421557864/se-2.

Lindberg, Melissa. "Frederick Douglass and the Power of Pictures." *The Library of Congress* (blog). February 28, 2020, https://blogs.loc.gov/picturethis/2020/02/frederick-douglass-and-the-power-of-pictures/.

Lorde, Audre. "The Master's Tools Will Never Dismantle the Master's House." In *This Bridge Called My Back: Writings by Radical Women of Color*. Edited by Cherrie Moraga and Gloria Anzaldúa. New York: Kitchen Table Press, 1983.

Los Angeles City Council meeting minutes. February 16, 2022. https://lacity.primegov.com/Portal/MeetingPreview?compiledMeetingDocumentFileId=22358.

Los Angeles Conservancy. "Ambassador Hotel (demolished)." *Los Angeles Conservancy*. https://www.laconservancy.org/locations/ambassador-hotel-demolished.

Los Angeles Conservancy. “Paul Revere Williams House.” *Los Angeles Conservancy*. https://www.laconservancy.org/issues/paul-revere-williams-house.

Masters, Nathan. *Lost LA*. Directed by Matt Bass. Season 4, Episode 4 (December 2, 2019). https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=K2z-M-EfwUo.

Meares, Hadley. “The Pride of West Adams.” *Curbed Los Angeles*. February 18, 2020. https://la.curbed.com/2020/2/18/21138451/golden-state-mutual-life-insurance-building-los-angeles.

Migdol, Erin. “Staff Profile,” *Getty Magazine*. Spring 2022, 8-10. https://www.getty.edu/news/leronn-brooks-profile-african-american-art-history-initiative/.

Miranda, Carolina A. “Architect Paul William’s archive, thought lost to fire, is safe. The Getty and USC will acquire it.” *Los Angeles Times*. June 30, 2020. https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2020-06-30/architect-paul-williams-archive-was-thought-lost-in-a-fire-it.

Mitchell, W. J. T. ed. *Landscape and Power* (1994). University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Mitchell, W. J. T. *Seeing Through Race*. Harvard University Press, 2012.

Mitchell, W. J. T. *What Do Pictures Want? The Lives and Loves of Images*. University of Chicago Press, 2006.

Moten, Fred. “Visible Music” In *In the Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003: 171-231.

Mulvey, Laura. “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema.” *Screen*. Volume 16, Issue 3 Autumn 1975. https://doi.org/10.1093/screen/16.3.6.

National Council of Architectural Registration Boards, *NBTN 2022*. https://www.ncarb.org/nbtn2022.

Olin, Margaret. “Touching Photographs: Roland Barthes’s ‘Mistaken’ Identification.” *Representations* 80, no. 1 (2002): 99–118. https://doi.org/10.1525/rep.2002.80.1.99.

Oliver, Melvin L. and Thomas M. Shapiro. *Black Wealth/White Wealth: A New Perspective on Racial Inequality*. New York: Routledge, 2006.

Oliver, Myrna. “Howard Morehead, 79; Photographer of Jazz Musicians Broke Color Barrier.” *Los Angeles Times*. July 24, 2003. https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-2003-jul-24-me-morehead24-story.html.

The Parisi Group and Compass Real Estate Brokerage. "Paul R. Williams Wasn't Just 'architect to the Stars,' He Shaped Los Angeles." Hollywood Hills.com (blog). January 18, 2021. https://hollywoodhills.com/blog/paul-r-williams-wasnt-just-architect-to-the-stars-he-shaped-los-angeles.

Peck, Raoul. *I am Not Your Negro*. 2016; Velvet Film, hulu, https://www.hulu.com/movie/i-am-not-your-negro-6a52ca6f-1c81-4653-8581-f9bb237c9d1b.

Poinsett, Alex. "Unsung Black Business Giants: Pioneer Entrepreneurs Laid Foundations for Today's Enterprises." *Ebony Magazine*. March 1990, n. 45, v. 5, 100. https://search-ebscohost-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/login.aspx?direct=true&AuthType=sso&db=ear&AN=139798746&site=ehost-live&scope=site.

Postrel, Virginia. "The Iconographer." *The Atlantic*. November 2006. https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2006/11/the-iconographer/305288/.

Redfin. Accessed February 28, 2023. https://www.redfin.com/CA/Los-Angeles/1271-W-35th-St-90007/home/6885118.

Rothstein, Richard. *The Color of Law: A Forgotten History of How Our Government Segregated America*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2017.

Rodgers, Royal Kennedy. *Hollywood's Architect: The Paul R. Williams Story*. Los Angeles: PBS So Cal, February 6, 2020. https://www.pbs.org/video/hollywoods-architect-3prwsa/.

Rogers, Guy MacLean. "Freedom in the Making of Western Culture." *Arethusa*, 28:1 (Winter, 1995): 87-98.

Roth, Sarah N. "'How a Slave was Made a Man': Negotiating Black Violence and Masculinity in Antebellum Slave Narratives." *Slavery and Abolition*, 28:2 (2007), DOI: 10.1080/01440390701428048.

Ryon, Ruth. "A forgotten black architect who designed mansions for movie stars." *Los Angeles Times*. July 23, 1989. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/forgotten-black-architect-who-designed-mansions/docview/280848865/se-2.

Ryon, Ruth. "Kin of Black Architect Gets More Data for Book." *Los* Angeles *Times*. Oct 1, 1989. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/newspapers/postscript-kin-black-architect-gets-more-data/docview/280794091/se-2.

Scharf, Aaron. *Art and Photography*. Middlesex, England: Penguin Books, 1974.

Silverman, Kaja. *The Threshold of the Visible World*. New York: Routledge, 1996.

Smith, Shawn Michelle. *American Archives: Gender, Race, and Class in Visual Culture*. Princeton University Press, 2000.

Smith, Shawn Michelle. *At the Edge of Sight: Photography and the Unseen*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2013.

Smith, Shawn Michelle. *Photographic Returns: Racial Justice and the Time of Photography*. Duke University Press, 2020.

Smith, Shawn Michelle and Sharon Sliwinski, ed. *Photography and the Optical Unconscious*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2017.

Sontag, Susan. *On Photography*. New York: Farrar, Straus & Giroux, 1977.

Stauffer, John, Zoe Trodd, and Celeste-Marie Bernier. Introduction to *Picturing Frederick Douglass: An Illustrated Biography of the Nineteenth Century's Most Photographed American*. New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 2015.

Stoler, Ann Laura. *Duress: Imperial Durabilities in Our Times*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2016.

Taylor, Keeanga-Yamahtta. *Race For Profit: How Banks and the Real Estate Industry Undermined Black Homeownership*. Chapel Hill: The University of North Carolina Press, 2019.

Trachtenberg, Alan. *Reading American Photographs: Images as History Mathew Brady to Walker Evans*. New York: Hill and Wang, 1989.

Ventura, Anya. "Inside the Johnson Publishing Company Archive." *Getty Magazine*. Spring 2022, 26. https://www.getty.edu/about/whatwedo/getty_magazine/gettymag_spring2022.pdf.

"Visual Timeline: The Remarkable Life of Paul R. Williams." *KCET*. February 5, 2020. https://www.kcet.org/shows/hollywoods-architect-the-paul-r-williams-story/visual-timeline-the-remarkable-life-of-paul-revere-williams.

Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith ed. *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Washington, Roberta. "Designing for Social Justice." In *Reconstructions: Architecture and Blackness in America*. Edited by Sean Anderson and Mabel O. Wilson. New York: Museum of Modern Art, 2021.

Wexler, Laura. "A More Perfect Likeness." In *Pictures and Progress: Early Photography and the Making of African American Identity*, 18-40. Edited by Wallace, Maurice O. and Shawn Michelle Smith. Durham: Duke University Press, 2012.

Wheatley, Phillis. *Poems on Various Subjects, Religious and Moral.* London: A. Bell Bookseller, 1773). https://digital.tcl.sc.edu/digital/collection/pwp/id/5.

Wilderson, Frank B. *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Duke University Press, 2010.

Willford, Stanley O. "Early American Black Architect, 85, Dead: Designed Some of Southland's Most Famous Landmarks." *Los Angeles Times*. January 28, 1980. http://ccl.idm.oclc.org/login?url=https://www.proquest.com/historical-newspapers/early-american-black-architect-85-dead/docview/162581870/se-2.

Williams, Chad L. *Wounded World: W. E. B. Du Bois and the First World War*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2023.

Williams, Paul. "I Am a Negro." *The American Magazine*. July 1937, n. 1, v. 124, 59 & 161-163.

Williams, Paul R. "An Architect Previews Tomorrow's Progress." In *The Scottish Rite Informer*. January – March 1957, n. 1, v. IX, 10-11.

Williams, Paul R. "If I Were Young Today." *Ebony*. August 1963, 56.

Williams, Paul R. "Spingarn Medal Acceptance Speech." NAACP Annual Convention, Kiel Auditorium, St. Louis, MO, June 26, 1953. https://hv-proquest-com.ccl.idm.oclc.org/pdfs/001410/001410_008_0772/001410_008_0772_From_1_to_64.pdf

Williamson, Judith. *Decoding Advertisements: Ideology and Meaning in Advertising* (1978). London: Marion Boyars, 1990.

Willis, Deborah ed. *Picturing Us: African American Identity In Photography*. New York: The New Press, 1994.

Willis, Deborah and Barbara Krauthamer. *Envisioning Emancipation: Black Americans and the End of Slavery*. Philadelphia, Pennsylvania: Temple University Press, 2013.

Wilson, Kristina. *Mid-Century Modernism and the American Body: Race, Gender, and the Politics of Power in Design*. New Jersey: Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2021.

Wolin, Sheldon S. "Hannah Arendt and the Ordinance of Time." In *Fugitive Democracy: And Other Essays*. Edited by Nicholas Xenos. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 2016. https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv7n0ck0.16.