"To Couple the Beauty of the Place and the Harsh Realities of Its Racist History"

Piecing Together African American Citizenship in Faith Ringgold's *Flag Story Quilt* and *Coming to Jones Road*[1]

Malaika Sutter

The pieced quilt has been a quintessential American object of heritage for more than two centuries. Focusing on a particularly African American inflection of this heritage, this chapter takes a closer look at Faith Ringgold's *Flag Story Quilt* (1985)[2] and her story quilt series *Coming to Jones Road* (1999–2000, 2009–2010).[3] As one of the most successful and prominent African American artists of the last quarter of the twentieth century, whose works of art are exhibited in many major art museums all around the world, Ringgold combines text, image, and textile—what I will call 'text(ile)-image constellations'—in order to trace the fragmented notion of as well as to craft uncomfortable yet empowering perspectives on African American citizenship.

For this, Ringgold's artworks use the American flag as an object that represents a seemingly fixed conception of citizenship and present in their reworking of the flag a notion of citizenship that is very much in flux. The intermedial and material aspects of the story quilt convey fragmentation yet they also illustrate the healing effect of piecing together past events, connecting past and present, and crafting alternative

1 Faith Ringgold (b. 1930) strongly emphasizes her African American heritage. She uses both Black and African American to describe her art. In line with scholarship on African American citizenship, this chapter relies heavily on this term, especially because of its historical dimension and Ringgold's substantial use of African American history in her art. The paper will also use the term Black in order to include Black people in the US who do not identify themselves with the term African American. The word will be capitalized in line with Black Feminists such as Brittney Cooper, using "Black" as a political and activist term (cf. Cooper).

2 The *Flag Story Quilt* is illustrated in Faith Ringgold's memoirs *We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (1995) on page 99.

3 The first part of the series is available as a booklet in *Feminist Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2007, pp. 350–360. The second part was not published as a booklet and thus has to be "pieced together." Most artworks are available on Artstor and individual pieces are shown on Ringgold's official website: www.faithringgold.com.

American (hi)stories, historiography, identities, and citizenship. In this sense, the story quilt, like literary writing, "has the power to imagine alternative forms of citizenship" (Banerjee 86).

"History Is Not the Past": The Fragmented and Incomplete African American Citizenship

In the US, one is born an American citizen (*jus soli*) or one can obtain citizenship through naturalization after having met certain requirements ("Citizenship and Naturalization").[4] Citizenship grants rights such as the "right to vote in elections for public officials" [5] or, more abstractly, the "freedom to pursue 'life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness.'" It also comes with responsibilities like to "respect and obey federal, state, and local laws" or to "defend the country if the need should arise" ("Should I Consider").

Apart from functioning as a factual status comprising certain benefits and duties, citizenship also serves as a concept, "a way of thinking about political and social membership" (Brubaker 3). This conceptual approach to citizenship also entails a communal aspect of being (and feeling as) part of what Benedict Anderson terms an "imagined community" (cf. Anderson). Citizenship is not only a legal status; it involves rights and obligations, it procures an identity and sense of belonging, and functions as an ideal to a community (Shachar et al. 5). Apart from rights and obligations, citizenship entails "a set of practices (cultural, symbolic and economic)" (Isin and Wood 4) and as such, cannot be analyzed through a legal framework alone; it is equally important to analyze it through a cultural lens (cf. Buikema et al.).

This cultural lens applies all the more since the possession of factual citizenship often does not mean equal access to rights in practice. As Lawrence D. Bobo's and other scholars' research has shown, despite being factual citizens, African American people are not granted "full citizenship" in the US. Bobo defines such "full" citizenship as the "complete and unmarked enjoyment of the full range of economic and material opportunities and resources, political and legal rights, and broader civil and social recognition and moral esteem that individuals in a society have available to them" (22). Bobo points to both "practices" and "status" as constituting "full citizenship." He argues that, despite the significant political, social, and cultural

4 In an attempt to restrict "birth tourism" to the US, the Trump administration issued a new policy January 24, 2020, to "deny any B visa application from an applicant whom the consular officer has reason to believe is traveling for the primary purpose of giving birth in the United States to obtain U.S. citizenship for their child" ("Birth Tourism Update").

5 A right that many people lose after incarceration as pointed out in Nina Heydt's chapter and Kaitlyn Quinn and Erika Canossini's chapter.

achievements by African Americans, this "unmarked" citizenship still stays out of reach as "basic racialized categories and identities remain alive and well in the United States" and African Americans "remain disadvantaged across most of the major domains of social life in the United States" (24).

American history demonstrates the vast number of, as Bobo terms them, "blockages and detours" that continue to obstruct full citizenship for African Americans (22), despite the duties and responsibilities fulfilled by them (for instance military service). Examining American history shows quickly that the incomplete citizenship of African Americans is rooted in a long tradition of exclusion. From a philosophical point of view, Charles W. Mills argues that nonwhite and non-European persons were never intended to be part of the "social contract" in the first place.[6] Using the term "racial contract" instead, Mills stresses that "we live in a world which has been *foundationally shaped for the past five hundred years by the realities of European domination and the gradual consolidation of global white supremacy*" (20; emphasis in the original).[7]

The effects of chattel slavery, the Jim Crow era, the long tradition of legal and social discriminatory practices within areas such as housing, employment, education, and health care can still be felt by Black Americans today. For instance, the massive wealth gap between Black and white people in the US can be traced back to "centuries of a compromised claim on citizenship" since wealth is chiefly inherited (Bobo 51). Mass incarceration or as Michelle Alexander terms it "The New Jim Crow," felony disenfranchisement, voter suppression, the continued violence against and the killing of Black people also but not only by police officers,[8] the four-year term of a racist (and misogynistic) president from 2017–2021, and the storming of the Capitol by white supremacists on January 6, 2021, after an election in which African American

6 The "social contract," an idea originating in the Age of Enlightenment, was shaped by philosophers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Thomas Hobbes, John Locke, and Immanuel Kant and involves the idea that humanity began in a "state of nature" and then agreed to live in a civil society, submitting to an authority (e.g., a ruler, the majority of votes). Mills exposes the white, patriarchal philosophical tradition and demonstrates that the "social contract" "is not a contract between everybody ('we the people'), but between just the people who count, the people who really are the people ('we the white people')" (3).

7 In addition, Carole Pateman's *The Sexual Contract* (1997) makes clear that this contract is also gendered.

8 Consequently, #BlackLivesMatter was founded in 2013 after the acquittal of the police officer who killed Trayvon Martin in Florida. It was after the murder of Michael Brown in Missouri in 2014 that the slogan became more visible in mainstream media. It started as a hashtag on social media and evolved into worldwide protests, a global organization and a vast number of local organizations all over the world (cf. "About BLM"; Ransby). The movement has been active since 2013 and strongly reignited after the murder of George Floyd by a police officer in Minnesota on May 25, 2020.

voters were instrumental—to name just a few—clearly illustrates the endurance of the "racial contract."[9]

It is this long tradition of and present day violent discriminatory practices and systemic racism that do not allow Black Americans to have equal freedom and equal access to rights and privileges that, on paper, are afforded to American citizens.[10] As such, the concept of citizenship and its practices are historically contingent. An engagement with history and its effects in our present day becomes inevitable when we want to discuss Black citizenship within the US. As James Baldwin explains in *I am not Your Negro*: "History is not the past. It is the present. We carry our history with us. We *are* our history" (107). As we will later see, Ringgold's story quilts emphasize the importance of history. They make use of it, connecting it to the present in order to exhibit "the as yet incomplete journey to full citizenship for African Americans" (Bobo 24). At the same time, they explore alternative conceptions of community and citizenship.

Text(ile)-Image Constellations: Quilting Identity, History, and Citizenship

Historian, quilter, and curator Carolyn L. Mazloomi argues that "[n]o artistic form is more closely associated with African-Americans than quilt making, representing skill, aesthetic beauty, and utilitarian need" (7). People from the African continent who were forced to the Americas brought with them long established sewing skills and although the pieced bed quilt was a particular European object that was unknown in Africa, patchwork techniques and quilted objects were produced on the African continent (Mazloomi 7).

Taken to another continent as enslaved people, they used these skills to make needlework objects such as quilts for the enslavers' houses but also for themselves (Mazloomi 7–11). Houston A. Baker, Jr. and Charlotte Pierce-Baker call these products "a double patch" (156) in which not only two cultures but also two experiences were woven together: "The quilts of Afro-America offer a *sui generis* context (a weaving together) of experiences and a storied, vernacular representation of lives conducted in the margins, ever beyond an easy and acceptable wholeness" (156). The patchwork signals fragments and at the same time wholeness, thereby creating "a patterned wholeness in the African diaspora" (156).

---

9 It should be noted here that people within other systems of oppression, such as gender, sexuality or disability, are even more exposed to racial discrimination and violence. This "intersectionality" should be kept in mind, particularly because Ringgold's artworks often depict women and are, evidently, made by a Black woman artist.

10 The racism that other ethnic minorities, such as Native American communities or Asian Americans, have to endure should lead to similar conclusions.

This "piecemeal" aspect of the quilt lends itself to discussing and materializing the fragmentary nature of memory, identity, and storytelling. However, what the quilt materializes is not only the fragmentation of experience, but also the different and creative piecing together of the blocks of history; filling gaps, offering alternative readings, and inscribing them with new political and cultural meanings. Carrying such charged messages, the quilt could and still can stimulate political activism ("craftivism").[11] As quilt tops pieced by individuals are often layered and stitched communally (e.g., "Quilting Bees" or "Quilting Frolics," cf. Berlo, "Chronicles" 215), they further enable people to bond and, in the process, to craft not only individual but also communal identities.

Art historian Janet Berlo argues that quilts are a quintessential American object of heritage "precisely because they represent so many things to so many people" and that the tales connected to the quilt are just as important in creating a particular image of American identity: "As symbolic objects, quilts give shape to an idealized story about American ingenuity and self-sufficiency in general, and female frugality, secrecy, originality, and artistry in particular" ("Acts of Pride" 9). Compelling myths and tales, such as the "scrap bag myth" (11) or the myth of an "Underground Railroad Quilt Code" (12), have a tight grip on an imagined American culture and genesis. The quilt's status within American culture "makes it thus an excellent medium to discuss and negotiate differently conceptualized notions of identities, histories, and forms of citizenship in the US" (Sutter 179–180).

In addition, the quilt as a woman connoted object enables the discussion of gendered issues as well as the use of this gendered history.[12] Throughout history, patriarchal culture connected needlework to a certain notion of "femininity" which has been linked to concepts of obedience, piety, chastity, fertility, and the domestic (Parker). This connection to femininity can be subverted but also used, for instance to mediate a traumatic history: "The quilts, as visual media, pose an alternative and non-threatening approach to topics … labeled … as the 'tough stuff of American history'" (Mazloomi 6). Through the quilt's associations with warmth, comfort, and the home, uncomfortable but crucial topics can be addressed.[13] Furthermore, the stark contrast between the cozy material and the traumatic and violent content can emphasize the discrepancies of what "home" can mean for different people.

---

11 The term "craftivism" was coined by writer Betsy Greer in 2003 "to designate work that combines craft and activism" (Parker xvii).

12 Men have always also engaged in needlework but while men were perceived as creators (weavers, tailors etc.), women were mostly linked to the acts of cleaning and patching things up (Goggin 40–41). Moreover, needlework was construed as inconsequential by the dominant patriarchal culture (cf. Parker). Yet and perhaps even because needlework was perceived as trivial, it has provided women with an opportunity to express themselves within this restrictive environment for centuries.

13 This is also visible in the NAMES Project AIDS Memorial Quilt.

Ringgold's quilts have been extensively analyzed by scholars; however, the concept of intermediality has never been used to study her work. The term "intermediality" entails "a broad variety of exchanges and border crossings between media" (Rippl 210). Ringgold started to use text in addition to images and textiles in the 1980s "out of [her] need to tell stories not with pictures or symbols alone, but with words" (Ringgold in Gouma-Peterson 23). She points to a medium's limits and that using an additional, different medium can offer new ways of creating meanings. The interaction between these different media and their "meaning-making" process opens "a space of semiotic and material in-between-ness" which allows readers to perceive "the world differently" (Neumann 513):

> Intermediality is charged with specific values, often taking up and taken on existing medial representations and subjecting them to the transformative dynamics of … translation. Accordingly, intermediality may intervene in the social fabric of existing medial configurations, reworking them in a way that allows readers to experience, see and imagine the world differently. (Neumann 513)

This aspect of reworking medial constellations in order for the reader to "imagine the world differently," I argue, is visible in Ringgold's *Flag Story Quilt* and her series *Coming to Jones Road*. Text, image, and textile each add a different dimension to the discussion of history, identity, and citizenship. Ringgold's text(ile)-image constellations allow the reader to reflect on the incomplete nature of African American citizenship. They function as means to expose the white violence implicated in this fragmentary citizenship and at the same time they re-imagine African American identities and histories, thereby giving "'colored folk' and women a taste of the American dream" (Ringgold in Roth 60).

Piecing Together the Flag: Fragmented Citizenship in the *Flag Story Quilt*

Faith Ringgold's artworks explore African Americans' incomplete citizenship and its history in many different ways but when we think of her story quilts, it is undoubtedly her *Flag Story Quilt* (1985) that comes to mind first. The 57x78-inch work of art combines text, image, and textile into a unique American flag. The border is a beige or off-white fabric which is the same fabric she uses for the stripes upon which she has painted her text. The binding is of an orange or ochre color. At the upper left, fifty off-white heads in profile are appliqued upon a pieced blue ground, mimicking the fifty stars of the flag that represent the fifty states of the US. The hovering skulls, in connection with the text and American history in general, allude to the many victims of lynching carried out by American mob violence over the last 150 years.

Ringgold's flag is composed of nine stripes. The stripes that can be read as the red stripes of the American flag are composed of rectangles of brightly colored tie-dyed fabric. The tie-dye creates the effect of splotches and drizzles which, with the strong use of the color red, evokes an uncanny resemblance to blood drips. However, the tie-dye effect, with its many different colors and swirls, simultaneously evokes creativity and excitement. Associating the tie-dye also with the hippie generations' tie-dyed t-shirts brings up images of peace and non-violent revolution. These tie-dyed stripes alternate with off-white stripes onto which the quilt's story is written in black. The color of "pure" white is excluded from this American flag, thus questioning notions of American "purity" and "innocence."

The fictional story told in the text concerns Memphis Cooly, a disabled Black man who was severely injured during the Vietnam War. He is imprisoned and faces the death sentence because he is accused of raping and killing a nineteen-year-old white girl. The story is told from the perspective of an omniscient, nameless narrator who knows the Cooly family. The narrator tells the reader bit by bit about Memphis' fate and reveals piece by piece the suspicion that his wife—a publisher from a big Madison Avenue company who acts as the "author" of Memphis' novels—framed him.

From the beginning, the story makes clear that the judicial system wants Memphis to be the perpetrator at all costs: "How he gonna slash some girl's throat and throw her in the Harlem River, and he ain' got no arms? How he gonna rape her sitting in a wheel chair paralyzed from the waist down? You reckon [they gonna say] Memphis scared that girl into slashing her own throat, and raping herself?" (Ringgold, *We Flew* 99, 255).[14] Using rhetorical questions, the narrator emphasizes the absurdity of the allegations and tells the reader later that Memphis is imprisoned and will be executed "for a crime he ain' commit" (99, 255). In addition, the narrator suggests that there was not even a murder: "They been draggin' that river for one year now and ain' come up with no dead white girl yet – cause ain' none" (99, 256). Despite ample evidence that Memphis Cooly is not the perpetrator of the crimes, and despite the fact that there may not even be a case in the first place, he is imprisoned and sentenced to death.

In her memoirs, Ringgold comments that the "story is based on the premise that the black man's guilt, whether likely or unlikely, is almost always taken for granted long before it is actually proven" (255). She thereby points to the myth of the "Black male rapist" which early activist and journalist Ida B. Wells unveiled

14 I use the illustration on page ninety-nine and the transcript on page 255 and 256 provided by Faith Ringgold in her *We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold* (1995). I use square brackets when significant text passages on the flag deviate from her transcript. I use the text from the flag, marked with square brackets, when I think it is relevant for the close reading.

and challenged.[15] In Ringgold's story, the tenacity of this myth is heightened to the point that not even clear evidence stands a chance. The myth stands above the law. Ringgold's story shows just how powerful such myths are, even to the point of infiltrating the American judicial system.

The last line of the story reads: "If it hadn't been for that scheming wife of his, he wouldn't been jetting round in that fancy wheel chair bar-hoppin' till all hours of the night, when the police [they] be out there lookin' for a n[…] to pin some dirt on" (99, 256).[16] Instead of a police force's duty to protect citizens, it is in fact the police who are endangering Black people—a statement that resonates with the police violence Black people have faced in the past and still have to endure today. The word "they" in the quilt also has an air of mob mentality, reminding the reader of the long history of lynching in the US.

Memphis' lack of full rights is then contrasted with the fulfilment of his duties when he was drafted for the Vietnam War. It was in this war that Memphis lost his arms and was paralyzed; quite literally fragmenting him: "Uncle Sam took [they fine boy, sent him off to Vietnam, and ship] him back all messed up and now this" (99, 255). This depiction is striking as the words "took," "sent off," and "ship" remind one rather of an object than a person, alluding to the Transatlantic slave trade and equating it with the drafting of Black Americans into war. When we take Memphis' fragmentation further and draw a connection to fragmentation grenades used in the Vietnam War which were also used for "fragging"—an act in which American soldiers attempted to kill their own superiors during the Vietnam War—the point of killing one's own fellow citizen is even further underlined (cf. "frag, v.")

According to the narrator, Memphis won "[ribbons and] medals of honor" (99, 256). He did not simply fulfill a citizen's obligation by going to war for his country, he also carried out extraordinary acts of valor which earned him a medal of honor but cost him his body. In contrast to the narratives by African American centenarians analyzed in Julia Velten's chapter, which emphasize how through hard work and assimilation you can belong, Ringgold's story quilt shows a more pessimistic picture. On the one hand, Memphis is asked to fight for his country and then rewarded for his service; on the other, he is imprisoned and killed for a crime he did not commit by the very country he was serving. A sentiment that goes hand in hand with civil rights activists' questioning the duty to fight for the US on the premise of "freeing"

15 In the 1890s, journalist and civil rights activist Ida B. Wells (b. 1862) reported on lynching in the US and exposed it and its myth of the Black male rapist as a way to oppress and intimidate Black people but especially successful Black business owners. She also called out white women's complicity in this white terror (cf. Cooper 177–178).

16 Ellipsis mine.

the people of Vietnam, when the US actually refuses freedom to a large number of its own citizens.[17]

Ringgold's story quilt is an alternative American flag. In American culture the national flag is treated as a kind of "holy" object, as suggested by the detailed directions as to its handling as well as the Flag Protection Acts of 1968 and 1989.[18] Knowing that Ringgold was arrested for co-organizing and co-curating "The People's Flag Show" (1970), where the American flag served artists as means to protest social injustices and the Vietnam War, adds a revolutionary and certainly a political element to the artwork (Farrington 141). Her *Flag Story Quilt* was also not her first artwork in which she made use of the flag. Her famous paintings *The Flag is Bleeding* (1967) and *Flag for the Moon: Die N[…]* (1967–1969)[19] very explicitly use the icon to expose and resist white violence. Patrick Hill argues that Ringgold was aware that such acts of appropriation were "especially threatening because access to it by a woman artist of color was perceived as an assault on citizenship entitlements defined as the singular province of whites" (29). Ringgold's acts of deconstruction and construction shed new light on a seemingly fixed object, making us aware of its materiality and its potential of attaining new meanings.

Ringgold's flag makes use of a cozy domestic object—a quilt—to mediate the same critique as in her flag paintings but adding another (gendered) layer of critique: "juxtaposing the American flag with signifiers of a distinctively feminist consciousness …, Ringgold extends the doubleness already contained in the flag …, effectively reclaiming it as a ground for both race- and gender-based critiques" (Hill 36). Furthermore, the story of Memphis massively clashes with the flag as symbol of American pride as well as with the quilt as a domestic object, exposing different notions of home and of citizenship in the US. Ringgold literally inscribes the story of a Black disabled Veteran and his entrepreneurial family onto an American flag,

17 An excerpt from Martin Luther King's speech "Beyond Vietnam" encapsulates this stance very well: "It was sending their sons and their brothers and their husbands to fight and to die in extraordinarily high proportions relative to the rest of the population. We were taking the black young men who had been crippled by our society and sending them eight thousand miles away to guarantee liberties in Southeast Asia which they had not found in southwest Georgia and East Harlem. And so we have been repeatedly faced with the cruel irony of watching Negro and white boys on TV screens as they kill and die together for a nation that has been unable to seat them together in the same schools. And so we watch them in brutal solidarity burning the huts of a poor village, but we realize that they would hardly live on the same block in Chicago. I could not be silent in the face of such cruel manipulation of the poor" (King).

18 Although the Flag Protection Acts criminalize a person for burning or defiling the American flag, it was ruled in *Texas v. Johnson* (1989) that the act of burning the flag is in fact protected by the First Amendment (Brennan and Supreme Court of The United States).

19 Ellipsis mine.

thereby reinserting stories neither unfamiliar nor prominently featured in American history.[20]

Ringgold's text(ile)-image constellation mediates Memphis' fragmentation textually, visually, and materially. The visual medium celebrates diversity and creativity, while at the same time pointing to the long history of white violence against Black people. The textile medium adds to this tension through its association with home as well as through the American flag as an object of honor and pride. The text reinserts an African American experience into American history and further exposes the fragmentation and incompletion of African American citizenship in the US. In this sense, Ringgold's text(ile)-image constellation gives new meaning to mediation in that the fragmentation is mediated via multiple media all at once, virtually keeping the fragmentation intact, a fragmentation that can be read, seen, and felt.

"Turn[ing] all the Ugliness of Spirit, Past and Present, Into Something Livable": Constituting the "Free Citizen" in the Series *Coming to Jones Road*

Whereas Ringgold's *Flag Story Quilt* discusses a fragmented notion of African American citizenship in one single artwork, Ringgold's story quilt series *Coming to Jones Road* takes a different approach. The series consists of two story quilt parts and the second part also entails a tanka part.[21] Each story quilt is composed of a large central canvas onto which Ringgold painted her subjects with acrylic and which is framed by pieces of fabric sewn together. Some of the story quilts use up to four different pieced frames and the text of the story is written onto the innermost textile frame using one line that circles the painted subject, thus creating an additional textual framework. Quilt stitches on the fabric surface create the effect of fragmentation.

Eight quilts produced between 1999 and 2000 comprise Part I of the series. Ringgold published a booklet containing an introductory text, images of the quilts, and a transcript for each quilt (cf. "Coming to Jones Road"). The narrative follows Barn Door and his wife Precious, her baby—born *en route* and named Freedom—and twenty-six other African Americans escaping slavery through the Underground Railroad. Their journey starts when Aunt Emmy appears as a vision before Barn Door, instructing him to come to Jones Road, Englewood, New Jersey and to look for her house which he will find by his own mother's star quilt on the roof.

20 In this context it is interesting to note that it was an African American girl who helped sew an American flag that would inspire Francis Scott Key to write lyrics that would later become the national anthem: "Black girls and women like Grace have literally stitched themselves into our nation's history in places of prominence and behind the scenes" (Berry and Gross 6).

21 *Tankas* or *thankas* are Tibetan paintings on fabric (Farrington 154).

In the introduction of her booklet, Ringgold explains that upon moving to Jones Road in 1992, she faced "hostile neighbors" and struggled with the town board "for more than six years" in order to receive permits to build her studio ("Coming to Jones Road" 352). This experience was "extremely traumatic" and inspired her to concentrate on African Americans who came to New Jersey before her. Ringgold explains in her introduction to the series that she "tried to couple the beauty of the place and the harsh realities of its racist history" in a series which "turns all the ugliness of spirit, past and present, into something livable" ("Coming to Jones Road" 351).

The first two quilts do not contain text. In the booklet, the artist explains that she started, in the first quilt, with the image of "a trail of shadowy figures under a moonlit sky stealing through the landscape in pursuit of freedom at Aunt Emmy's little white house on Jones Road" (353). The second quilt shows the same landscape in daylight, again depicting the shadowy figures and Emmy's white house in the background. Ringgold explains that she "needed to see the shadowy figures in a more positive view early on" and "envisioned them coming from church on a Sunday afternoon" (354). Thus, the first two works of art are set in the future when the group has already made it to Aunt Emmy's house. The series refers to the present (Ringgold's present), the past, and the future of the past.

These layers of time emphasize the role of history in understanding Ringgold's present experience of racism. Telling the story of enslaved people who came to Jones Road in the centuries before Ringgold in order to find freedom highlights the long history of incomplete citizenship for African Americans. Ringgold's experience of not being accepted in a white neighborhood in twentieth/twenty-first-century New Jersey furthermore illustrates the restrictions she still faces within a white space. Ringgold demonstrates, along the lines of Sara Ahmed's "A Phenomenology of Whiteness," that some spaces are "inhabitable for some bodies and not others" determining "who gets to be at home" and who does not (162). The quilt as a cozy bed comforter we associate with the home can emphasize this paradox of not "getting to be at home" and at the same time can be read as an alternative home constructed through the fictional fabric of a story, a home for the African American citizen.

Ringgold's third quilt depicts the character "Aunt Emmy" inspired by a photograph of Ringgold's "great grandmother, Betsy Bingham" ("Coming to Jones Road" 353). The rest of the quilts (number four to eight) all depict the "shadowy figures"—black silhouettes with a kind of glow outlining their bodies—amidst the woods. Rather small in comparison to the large trees surrounding them, these figures are always at the center of the paintings. The story ends with them arriving at Aunt Emmy's house with the Star Quilt on its roof, mentioned in the third quilt when Aunt Emmy appears in Barn Door's dream: "Look for an old white farmhouse with your dead Mama's star quilt on the roof" (355). The quilt is the last piece to look for on their journey, guiding them like the North Star. Because it is the quilt of Barn Door's mother, it is also a family heirloom passed on to other family members,

illustrating its importance as an object of African American heritage. The quilts from the first part use rather dark and heavy colors as they depict the characters walking through the woods at night. The paintings are framed with colorful fabric stripes which often also show different and multiple shapes. The painted trees' outmost leaves always overlap with and partly escape the frame.

Like the trees escaping their framing, the characters emphasize their quest for freedom. The words "free" and "freedom" appear in almost all the quilt texts and are especially frequently used in the last quilt when the children sing or cheer: "'We free! We free! Aunt Emmy got us now! We free! We free now! …'" (360). Precious' baby is named "Freedom" because "'this here baby is a freedom chile'" (358) and is furthermore declared a communal baby: "'she our baby too,' cause we all know she was born to be free" (358). The text mentions the struggles the characters face, but they are not shown in detail, rather it is Freedom's birth, a dinner in the woods, and the children playing at the end which are at the center of the story. The text gives the quilt an optimistic and joyous note; this perspective makes the dark color appear rather as calm and soothing.

Knowing from the first two quilts that they will make it to Aunt Emmy's house further adds to this calm atmosphere and emphasizes Ringgold's control over the narrative. Unlike many other stories from the eighteenth and nineteenth century, the story quilt's fictional tale ends happily. Ringgold's fictional historiography makes us wonder about the many other tales of escape that remain unrecorded. Her story quilts not only offer an alternative viewpoint on (hi)story and (hi)story-telling but they further point to the quilt as an alternative object onto which stories of African Americans have been recorded for centuries. The act of piecing together this (hi)story is further embodied in the series consisting of multiple artworks that may not always be exhibited together.

This fragmentation of (hi)story-telling is illustrated by a second part created ten years later, in 2009 and 2010. The series starts with a quilt depicting Ringgold's husband Burdette "Birdie" Ringgold and dedicating the series to Birdie with a statement of love and gratitude. Thus, Ringgold maintains the temporal fragmentation in this part of the series. The second quilt connects to the first part of the series, reiterating some of the text from the last quilt of the first part. The rest feature the same characters, depicting them in couples or groups, giving more information on the characters. This time, the fictional narrative is not as linear as in the first part, but rather sketches the characters' feelings and experiences. Whereas the quilts from the first part depict black silhouettes, the ones from the second part show all the figures in great detail. While still surrounded by nature, they occupy a larger part of the painting. Thus, the characters are now free to take shape as individuals with distinctive appearances and experiences within the group.

The second quilt of this part reiterates some of the text from the last quilt in the first part of the series but the image is different. The group who made it to free-

dom—including Baby Freedom swaddled in a quilt-like blanket—stands behind another quilt, a "welcome quilt" made by Aunt Emmy for the group (Ringgold *Part 2 #2*). This flag-shaped quilt features red and white alternating stripes onto which a large blue rectangle is sewn at the center with a white star with the year 1792 imprinted in red. In the story, 1792 is the year when the group made it to Aunt Emmy, achieving freedom. The artist's daughter, Michele Wallace, explains that Ringgold "chose this date, after the American Revolution and before the Civil War, to assign them *their* freedom" (27; emphasis mine). Ringgold creates a historical date for the fictional group of African Americans that is unconnected to any white historiography (especially because "New Jersey was one of the last states in the Union to free the slaves" [27]), for she is intent upon crafting a personal historiography.

Looking at this intradiegetic flag quilt, one immediately thinks of her *Flag Story Quilt*. Using the colors of the American flag but changing the design in order to highlight the personal history of the group illustrates the need for an alternative flag, an alternative conception of community, of belonging and thus also of citizenship. Together with the story, a story equally of hardship and joy and a story at the center of which freedom rests, Ringgold's quilt series pieces together the notion of the free citizen. Ringgold's personal story, which is interwoven in the first part of the series but also alluded to in the first quilt featuring Birdie, points to an "unequal freedom" she experiences in the twentieth/twenty-first century. Ringgold explains in an artist statement: "our white neighbors (unsuccessfully) sought to deny us the freedom to live there. Freedom, you know, is not free – It took me six years to realize my dream of a beautiful studio surrounded by a beautiful garden" ("Artist Statement").

This emphasis on both hardship and joy remains a focus in the last part. Each of the tankas illustrates an African American activist. One depicts Martin Luther King and an excerpt from his iconic "I Have a Dream" speech delivered at the March on Washington in 1963. Another depicts Sojourner Truth and some passages from her "Ain't I a Woman" speech from 1851. And another depicts Harriet Tubman and a description of some of her achievements. All three works feature the portrait framed in a rectangle with text in the background. Framing each portrait and text is a flowering bush and a pieced fabric border. These three famous activists emphasize both the hardship and the successes of African American communities. They embody the long tradition of African American activism and their fight for full citizenship.

Harriet Tubman, who used the North Star to guide her towards freedom, is mirrored in the story when the characters look for the Star Quilt placed on Aunt Emmy's roof in the first part of the series. The star, which can also symbolize a dream, is further visible in Martin Luther King's speech: "I have a dream that one day on the red hills of Georgia the sons of former slaves and the sons of slave owners will be able to sit down together at the table of brotherhood. I have a dream that one day even the state of Mississippi … will be transformed into an oasis of freedom and justice" (Ringgold *Part 2 Tanka #3*). Drawing on history and looking into the future, Martin

Luther King's dream has yet to fully come true; the ability to hold onto this dream of complete freedom is encapsulated in the quilts' frequent use of the word "freedom" as well as in Ringgold's need to look back in order to envision a future. Sojourner Truth adds a gendered dimension, reminding us that not only the sons of formerly enslaved people and enslavers but also their daughters must be included in this dream.

In this impressive series, the text(ile)-image constellations highlight fragmentation on different levels: through the quilt as a "piecemeal" object, the temporal fragmentation in the text, and the serial aspect visible in the different aesthetics Ringgold used. The series pieces together the past through a fictional yet familiar story and connects it with the present, reminding us that the fight for freedom is still ongoing. Ringgold constructs a story and a sense of identity by interweaving it with her own story.[22] As cultural critic Stuart Hall reminds us, "the self is always, in a sense, a fiction" (45). The text(ile)-image constellations elucidate that identity has always been fragmented and such fragmentation offers new ways of piecing together a self, a (hi)story, a different world.

Epilogue

In 2020, when Ringgold turned ninety, she crafted yet another flag. The Rockefeller Center in Manhattan asked designers and artists to create flag designs which celebrate the city of New York which were then installed around The Rink. Ringgold's flag uses as a background a red, a white, and a blue horizontal stripe. The words "We are the world" are imprinted onto the red top stripe in white and in the same color and font the words "the life & Breath of Freedom" are written on the lower blue stripe. In the middle, detailed images of people are drawn on a circle. They are diverse in age, gender, and ethnicity. All wear brightly colored and patterned clothing giving the impression of variety and joy. Around the circle in a black font are the words Native Americans, Africans, Asians, Caribbeans, South Americans, Europeans. To the right of the circle is written "love, Faith Ringgold" (Chan).

The use of the word "Breath" in 2020 is striking, immediately bringing to mind the murder of George Floyd—as well as other Black people before him—who uttered the words "I can't breathe" before being murdered by police officer Derek Chauvin on May 25, 2020 (Baker et al.). These words became a rallying cry for the many national and international Black Lives Matter protests, events that touched activist and artist Ringgold: "His breath was stolen by a system that threatens our freedom" (Ringgold

22 In fact, Ringgold's use of textiles in her art making is very much connected to telling her own story. Ringgold explains in an interview that when she had issues getting her autobiography published, she decided to write her story onto the quilts instead (Serpentine Galleries).

in Morris). Ringgold's flag once more points to white supremacist violence while at the same time reminding us what to fight for: a diverse and free community, a kind of citizenship that includes, protects, and belongs to all.

Works Cited

"About BLM." *Black Lives Matter*, 16 Oct. 2020, blacklivesmatter.com/about/.

Ahmed, Sara. "A Phenomenology of Whiteness." *Feminist Theory*, vol. 8, no. 2, 2007, pp. 149–168.

Alexander, Michelle. *The New Jim Crow: Mass Incarceration in the Age of Colorblindness*. Tenth anniversary edition, The New Press, 2020.

Anderson, Benedict. *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*. Revised edition, Verso, 2016.

Baker, Houston A., Jr., and Charlotte Pierce-Baker. "Patches: Quilts and Communities in Alice Walker's 'Everday Use.'" *Alice Walker*, edited by Barbara T. Christian, Rutgers UP, 1994, pp. 149–165.

Baker, Mike, et al. "Three Words. 70 Cases. The Tragic History of 'I Can't Breathe.'" *The New York Times*, 29 Jun. 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2020/06/28/us/i-cant-breathe-policearrest.html.

Baldwin, James. *I am not Your Negro*, compiled and edited by Raoul Peck, Vintage International, 2017.

Banerjee, Mita. "Race and Citizenship." *Handbook of the American Novel of the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Christine Gerhardt, De Gruyter, 2018, pp. 74–90.

Berlo, Janet Catherine. "'Acts of Pride, Desperation, and Necessity': Aesthetics, Social History, and American Quilts." *Wild by Design: Two Hundred Years of Innovation and Artistry in American Quilts*, edited by Janet Catherine Berlo and Patricia Cox Crews, International Quilt Study Center at the University of Nebraska in association with U of Washington P, 2003, pp. 5–31.

—. "Chronicles in Cloth: Quilt-Making and Female Artistry in Nineteenth-Century America." *Local/Global: Women Artists in the Nineteenth Century*, edited by Deborah Cherry and Janice Helland, Ashgate, 2006, pp. 201–222.

Berry, Daina Ramey and Kali Nicole Gross. *A Black Women's History of the United States*. Beacon P, 2020.

"Birth Tourism Update." *U.S. Department of State*, 23 Jan. 2020, travel.state.gov/content/travel/en/News/visas-news/20200123_birth-tourism-update.html.

Bobo, Lawrence D. "An American Conundrum: Race, Sociology, and the African American Road to Citizenship." *The Oxford Handbook of African American Citizenship, 1865–Present*, edited by Henry Louis Gates, Jr. et al., Oxford UP, 2012, pp. 19–70.

Brennan, William J., Jr, and Supreme Court of The United States. *U.S. Reports: Texas v. Johnson, 491 U.S. 397*. 1989. Periodical. Retrieved from the Library of Congress, https://www.loc.gov/item/usrep491397/.

Brubaker, William Rogers. "Introduction." *Immigration and the Politics of Citizenship in Europe and North America*, edited by William Rogers Brubaker, UP of America, 1989, pp. 1–27.

Buikema, Rosemarie, et al. "Introduction." *Cultures, Citizenship and Human Rights*, edited by Rosemarie Buikema et al., Routledge, 2020, pp. 1–8.

Chan, TF. "'The Flag Project' at Rockefeller Center shares messages of hope, unity and love."*Wallpaper**, 10 Aug. 2020, https://www.wallpaper.com/art/the-flag-project-rockefeller-center-new-york.

"Citizenship and Naturalization." *USCIS*, 5 Jul. 2020, https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learn-about-citizenship/citizenship-and-naturalization.

Cooper, Brittney. *Eloquent Rage: A Black Feminist Discovers Her Superpower*.Picador, 2018.

Farrington, Lisa E. *Creating Their Own Image: The History of African-American Women Artists*. Oxford UP, 2005.

"frag, v." *OED Online*, Oxford UP, March 2021, https://www.oed.com/view/Entry/74111. Accessed 21 Apr. 2021.

Goggin, Maureen Daly. "Stitching a Life in 'Pen of Steele and Silken Inke': Elizabeth Parker's *circa* 1830 Sampler." *Women and the Material Culture of Needlework and Textiles, 1750–1950*, edited by Maureen Daly Goggin and Beth Fowkes Tobin, Ashgate, 2009, pp. 31–49.

Gouma-Peterson, Thalia. "Modern Dilemma Tales: Faith Ringgold's Story Quilts." *Faith Ringgold: A Twenty-five Year Survey*, edited by Eleanor Flomenhaft et al., Fine Arts Museum of Long Island, 1990, pp. 23–48.

Greer, Betsy. *Craftivism: The Art of Craft and Activism*. Arsenal Pulp Press, 2014.

Hall, Stuart. "Minimal Selves." *The Real Me: Post-Modernism and the Question of Identity*, edited by Lisa Appignanesi, The Institute of Contemporary Arts, 1987, pp. 44–46.

Hill, Patrick. "The Castration of Memphis Cooly: Race, Gender, and Nationalist Iconography in the Flag Art of Faith Ringgold." *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts*, edited by Dan Cameron et al., U of California P, 1998, pp. 26–38.

Isin, Engin F. and Patricia K. Wood. *Citizenship and Identity*. SAGE Publications, 1999.

King, Martin Luther, Jr. "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence." *Thirteen*, 4 Apr. 1967, https://www.thirteen.org/blog-post/martin-luther-kings-most-controversial-speech-beyond-vietnam/.

Mazloomi, Carolyn L. "And Still We Rise: Race, Culture, and Visual Conversations." *And Still We Rise: Race, Culture, and Visual Conversations*, edited by Carolyn L. Mazloomi. Schiffer Publishing, 2015, pp. 6–11.

Mills, Charles W. *The Racial Contract*. Cornell UP, 1997.

Morris, Bob. "Faith Ringgold Will Keep Fighting Back." *The New York Times*, 11 Jun. 2020, https://www.nytimes.com/2020/06/11/arts/design/faith-ringgold-art.html.

Neumann, Birgit. "Intermedial Negotiations: Postcolonial Literatures." *Handbook of Intermediality: Literature – Image – Sound – Music*, edited by Gabriele Rippl, De Gruyter, 2015, pp. 512–529.

Parker, Rozsika. *The Subversive Stitch: Embroidery and the Making of the Feminine*. I. B. Tauris & Co Ltd, 2010.

Pateman, Carole. *The Sexual Contract*. Stanford UP, 2018.

Ransby, Barbara. *Making All Black Lives Matter: Reimagining Freedom in the Twenty-First Century*. U of California P, 2018.

Ringgold, Faith. "Coming to Jones Road." *Feminist Studies*, vol. 33, no. 2, 2007, pp. 350–360.

—. *Coming to Jones Road Part 2: Martin Luther King Jr. Tanka #3: I Have a Dream*. 2010, Serpentine Galleries, London. *Faith Ringgold*, edited by Melissa Blanchflower et al., Serpentine Galleries, 2019, pp. 145.

—. *Coming to Jones Road Part 2 #2: We Here Aunt Emmy Got US Now*. 2010, Serpentine Galleries, London. *Faith Ringgold*, edited by Melissa Blanchflower et al., Serpentine Galleries, 2019, pp. 141.

—. "Faith Ringgold's Artist Statement." *faithringgold.blogspot*, 21 Sep. 2007, http://faithringgold.blogspot.com/2007/03/bio-chronology.html.

—. *We Flew Over the Bridge: The Memoirs of Faith Ringgold*. Bulfinch Press, 1995.

Rippl, Gabriele. "Intermediality and Remediation." *Handbook of Anglophone World Literatures*, edited by Gabriele Rippl et al., De Gruyter, 2020, pp. 209-225.

Sutter, Malaika. "Hate Speech in Threads: Stitching and Posting a Resistance in the *Tiny Pricks Project*. *Discourse*, vol. 45, no. 1–2, 170–198.

Roth, Moira. "Of Cotton and Sunflower Fields: The Making of *The French* and *The American Collection*." *Dancing at the Louvre: Faith Ringgold's French Collection and Other Story Quilts*, edited by Dan Cameron et al., U of California P, 1998, pp. 49–63.

Serpentine Galleries. "An Evening with Faith Ringgold." *YouTube*, 15 Jul. 2019, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=EcUPrr9nNJg.

Shachar, Ayelet, et al. "Introduction: Citizenship – *Quo Vadis*?" *The Oxford Handbook of Citizenship*, edited by Ayelet Shachar et al., Oxford UP, 2017, pp. 3–11.

"Should I Consider U.S. Citizenship?" *USCIS*, 5 Jul. 2020, https://www.uscis.gov/citizenship/learn-about-citizenship/should-i-consider-us-citizenship.

Wallace, Michele. "Black Power." *Faith Ringgold*, edited by Melissa Blanchflower et al., Serpentine Galleries, 2019, pp. 10–29.