

that it uncritically celebrates (white) LGBTIQ visibility politics instead of “challenging the repressive discourses and practices through which the respectable queer citizen is constructed in the first place” (Ritchie, “Come Out of the Closet” 562). *Stuck Rubber Baby* not only appropriates the Civil Rights Movement to articulate the urgency of struggles against cis_hetero_sexism, it also replaces anti-racist activism with a specifically white LGBTIQ struggle for increased visibility and recognition, the deep grammar of which is racist and colonialist. In search of “queer politics that don’t rely on visibility, that don’t rely on whiteness” (Sanchez) and instead of seeking recognition on the backs of People of Color and Indigenous people,

It could be a useful path that ‘homosexuals’ give up the search for ‘individual recognition’ of gendered and sexual acts – in the sense of being identified by the state as belonging to a clear category – and that they learn new ways of living together that refrain from positioning themselves against the supposed ‘others’ in a racist and colonial way.¹⁵ (Çetin and Voß, 30)

In its unquestioned belief in the efficacy of gay visibility politics, however, and in its assumption that Toland’s coming out contributes to the same fight the Civil Rights Movement fought, *Stuck Rubber Baby* remains deeply mired in white gay politics and is still rather far removed from a politics that could truly be called intersectional.

4.7 CONCLUSION: STUCK IN A WHITE FANTASY

In many ways, *Stuck Rubber Baby* offers a thoughtful, nuanced, convincing fictional portrait of what life might have been like for a young, white, closeted gay man who came in touch with the Civil Rights Movement in the South in the early 1960s. It provides an unflinching look at the rampant racism, ranging from casual every-day interactions to cases of extreme violence, that white people in the segregated South embodied, perpetuated, and taught their children, some-

15 “könnte [es] damit ein sinnvoller Weg sein, dass ‚Homosexuelle‘ die Suche nach ‚individueller Anerkennung‘ – im Sinne klarer kategorialer und staatlicher Identifizierung – der geschlechtlichen und sexuellen Handlungen aufgeben und neue Weisen des Zusammenlebens erlernen, die darauf verzichten, sich rassistisch und kolonial gegen die vermeintlichen ‚Anderen‘ positionieren zu wollen.”

times even despite their best intentions. It shows white apathy and hesitancy even among comparatively conscious young white people in the face of vibrant Black activism for racial justice. These portrayals do not let white people off the hook easily. They remind us of our collective and individual responsibility to work against the evil of racism, and not just by denouncing the 'obvious racists' but also by addressing the racism within each of us.

Given that *Stuck Rubber Baby* is drawn by a white author, it even manages to portray Black gays and lesbians and their place in the Black community with rare nuance. It does not give in to the temptation to depict Black people as 'particularly cis_hetero_sexist.' Quite to the contrary, it recognizes specific forms of acceptance for gays and lesbians within Black communities that go far beyond what Toland is able to find within white communities. The graphic novel also opens up a space in which it becomes possible to imagine same-sex encounters across the color line as part of the Civil Rights Movement and it shows white supremacists as viciously attacking people suspected of being LGBTIQ as well. *Stuck Rubber Baby* thus challenges common white narratives of white people being particularly accepting of LGBTIQ people and it works against the white erasure of People of Color from LGBTIQ historiographies.

At the same time, however, the comic also buys into discourses claiming that 'gay is the new Black.' It equates cis_hetero_sexism with racism and thus exaggerates the systemic diminishment of life chances for white LGBTIQ people while appropriating the urgency of the Civil Rights Movement for the fight against cis_hetero_sexism. It allows gay white people to imagine that they can overcome their racism by becoming intimate with Black people. It ultimately leaves the fantasy intact that out gay white people are generally (and rather miraculously, given the comic's otherwise meticulous portrayal of white racism) not racist. In *Stuck Rubber Baby*, out gay white people are not only not racist, they are also victims of exactly the same violence that targets Black people, which makes it almost impossible to see them even as potential perpetrators of that violence. In its desire to establish white gay people as racially innocent, the graphic novel imagines a counterfactual harmony between Black and white LGBTIQ people, who are portrayed as united in their shared marginalization as well as in their shared struggle. Because *Stuck Rubber Baby* imagines the struggle against racism and the struggle against cis_hetero_sexism as one, gay visibility politics eventually comes to replace anti-racist activism, with Black people giving their blessing to and applauding the courage it took Toland to come out and make his homosexuality visible. Very much in line with a political strategy that seeks to mobilize support for LGBTIQ rights by claiming that 'gay is the new Black,' the comic portrays racism as safely in the past, while the present is

characterized by the urgency of seeking inclusion into a racist and colonialist nation state for those LGBTIQ people that are able (and willing) to fit within that framework.

In the final analysis, *Stuck Rubber Baby* remains stuck in a white fantasy of a post-racial LGBTIQ community. In this fantasy, genuinely white gay politics that mainly serve the interests of white gay people (i.e. Toland's public coming out) are imagined as effective activism on behalf of a happily diverse LGBTIQ community. This fantasy stands in the way of white LGBTIQ people honestly reckoning with our own ongoing participation in systems of oppression and in the way of questioning the racial politics of what passes for LGBTIQ activism in order for a truly intersectional politics to emerge that does not equate racism and hetero_cis_sexism but rather works to dismantle all of these systems of oppression in their interlocking, overlapping, contradictory complexity and on-going efficacy.

