claims that 'gay is the new Black.' The ways in which *Stuck Rubber Baby* takes up these discourses illustrate the validity of long-standing critiques that see these discourses as downplaying Black suffering and as placing it in the distant past as an issue that has long been addressed and 'solved,' while simultaneously appropriating Black suffering to argue for the urgency of addressing LGBTIQ suffering in the present. Even though the graphic novel, in parts, offers a nuanced portrayal of how Civil Rights activism and queerness did intersect in the South during the early 1960s, it does not build on this portrayal to create a convincing vision of what intersectional forms of activism might look like that simultaneously address racism and cis_hetero_sexism in a way that recognizes the ongoing effectiveness and mutual imbrication of both forms of oppression. This lack of vision mirrors the lack of attention that LGBTIQ white people in the U.S. have paid to existing intersectional activism. In opting for a historical progress narrative that equates racist and cis_hetero_sexist violence and establishes the gay and lesbian movement as the more current version of a Black Civil Rights Movement that appears to be no longer necessary, *Stuck Rubber Baby* follows and gives credence to the anti-intersectional, anti-Black policy decisions of the single-issue strand of the gay and lesbian movement since at least the mid 1970s that began to be framed in the language of 'gay is the new Black' since the early 1990s.

4.6 FURTHER INTERSECTIONAL CRITIQUES

So far, I have referred to existing critiques of 'gay is the new Black' discourses to show that *Stuck Rubber Baby* does employ these discourses by equating racism and cis_hetero_sexism, depicting gay white men and Black people as victims of the same violence, and subscribing to a historical progress narrative that sees the fight against cis_hetero_sexism as currently more urgent than the fight against racism. In what follows, I will demonstrate that by paying close attention to the racial politics in the graphic novel it is possible to detect further problematic dimensions of 'gay is the new Black' discourses that have not yet been analyzed in the critical literature on these discourses.

4.6.1 Openly Gay White Men as Racially Innocent

The first of these dimensions has to do with how 'gay is the new Black' discourses also serve to establish LGBTIQ people as racially innocent. Taken to-

gether, the assumptions that racism has been overcome and that contemporary LGBTIQ people still suffer from the same violence that 'used to' target both People of Color and LGBTIQ people in the past also imply that LGBTIQ people cannot themselves be perpetrators of racism. In the following sub-chapters, I will show that *Stuck Rubber Baby* generally offers a rather nuanced depiction of both racism and racist white people, but that, in the end, it nevertheless suggests that once white people come out as gay, they also simultaneously and automatically become 'good white people' and cease to play an active part in racial domination.

4.6.1.1 Portraying Racists

In "The Long and Winding Stuck Rubber Road," Cruse explicitly states that one of his intentions in drawing *Stuck Rubber Baby* was to tackle the complex subject of racism: "I never addressed racism directly in *Wendel* because I feared trivializing the many issues that swirled around the central skin-color bugaboo. Racial bigotry's complexity as a subject called for a larger canvas than my double-page spreads in *The Advocate* provided. And what would a graphic novel be, if not a really large canvas?" As Bechdel has shown with the even shorter biweekly format of *Dykes*, it is quite possible to address complex social issues in a funny newspaper strip. As I discussed above, *Dykes*'s difficulties in dealing with race seem to have less to do with the format of the strip (after all, the "canvas" of *Dykes* with its more than 500 individual strips ended up being much larger than *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s 210 pages …) and more with the explosive nature of racism. Nevertheless, a graphic novel obviously allows for a lot more creative freedom to explore difficult topics in an adequate way than a newspaper strip. Cruse uses this freedom to deliver a truthful portrayal of whiteness that differs quite substantially from *Dykes* in that it shows whiteness as closely linked to quotidian performances of racism. *Stuck Rubber Baby* gives specific examples of how racism operates at the four levels of oppression – institutional, cultural, interpersonal, personal. Examples of institutional and cultural racism abound: Black people are not allowed to use a new parking deck in Clayfield's commercial district (14); the local college does not admit Black students (58); the city government attempts to shut down a park that serves as an important meeting point for Black people (65ff); Clayfield has segregated hospitals (105); and the white supremacist local newspaper, the *Dixie Patriot*, is ubiquitous.

On the interpersonal level, *Stuck Rubber Baby* features a host of white characters exhibiting varying degrees of extremely aggressive to more subtle forms of racism. On the extremely aggressive end of the spectrum are unnamed white people committing acts of physical intimidation, assault, and even murder. The

people in Toland's immediate surroundings are more prone to somewhat less obvious performances of interpersonal racism. Toland's sister, Melanie, and her husband, Orley, for example, are forever fighting because Melanie, who grew up with a lot of anti-Black racism herself (5), keeps trying to temper Orley's more virulent and outspoken racism. While a woman Toland half-heartedly attempts to date outright refuses to see him again (100) because his sister called the confederate flag a "cracker flag" (99) and his friend Riley referred to the *Dixie Patriot* as "Nazi propaganda" (98), a white waitress seems to share Toland's disgust for the *Dixie Patriot* but then more subtly betrays her racism when she slips in, "Of course, I **do** think they have a **point** when they say it's probably the **communists** who're convincin' the Negroes that they're so **dissatisfied**" (78). Considering that these are but a few examples of the many white people whose racist behavior Cruse exposes in the pages of his graphic novel, one can indeed say with D. Aviva Rothschild that "Cruse does a nice job with the 'casual' racists of Clayfield."

In *Stuck Rubber Baby*, white people are not only *shown* as being racist, but their words and actions are also framed in such a way that it is clear how reprehensible they are. Racism is reproduced not for the sake of simply depicting it (as part of a truthful portrait of the South in the early 1960s, for example) but for the sake of critiquing it. For example, on the second and third page of the comic, the intradiegetic narrator relates what his parents taught him about race relations. The sequence begins with a young Toland and his father working in his father's workshop. A father-to-son talk ensues, during the course of which Toland's father earnestly expounds upon his belief in white superiority and tries to impress upon his son the necessity of treating Black workers with a kind of benevolent (yet utterly condescending) paternalism. At some point, his mother joins the conversation and the conversation ends with both of his parents admonishing him, "And I don't **ever** want to hear you use the word **'n****,'** the way **some** folks around here do. It's a **hateful** term, and no creature of God **deserves** it" (3, see fig. 12). His father's racist exposition thus ends on a comparatively progressive note that shows that Toland's parents do not see themselves as racist but as 'good' white people who are clearly distinguished from the 'real' racists who use racial slurs.

Up to this point, the intradiegetic narrator recounts this conversation neutrally, without comment. The reader simply observes Toland's parents explaining their world to him. To a race cognizant[5] reader, it becomes clear immediately

5 Ruth Frankenberg coined the term "race cognizant" to refer to a "discursive repertoire that [...] insisted on the importance of recognizing *difference* – but with difference un-

that Toland's father's views are extremely racist, even relying on essentialist notions of a biological hierarchy of races, but just in case anybody missed the awfulness of what is being said, the narrator ends the sequence by commenting, "Later I'd look back **nostalgically** at the way my dad always took time to **explain** stuff to me in his fucked-up way" (3). While there might be a certain nostalgia involved in remembering the fatherly way in which Toland's father, who died in a car crash when Toland was still a teenager, tried to prepare his son for the world he would grow up in, the older Toland, who narrates the sequence, leaves no doubt that he now recognizes the content of his father's teaching as "fucked up."

Stuck Rubber Baby's depiction of white people in the South during the early 1960s as routinely engaging in daily acts of racial domination corroborates George Yancy's claim that "*to be white* in white America is *to be a problem*" ("Un-Sutured" xiii). Again, the graphic novel's rather unflinching portrayal of white people's collusion in the Jim Crow system is one of its greatest strengths, particularly in comparison to other queer comics by white artists, who do not nearly engage with racism in anything like the depth and nuance of *Stuck Rubber Baby*.

4.6.1.2 A Gay Kind of Innocence

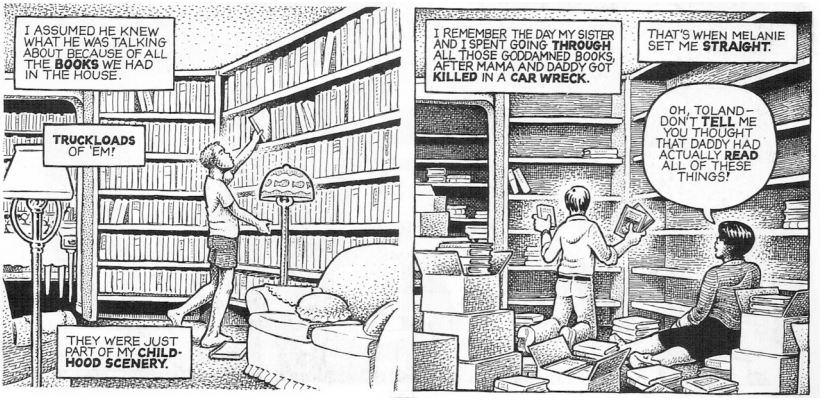
Remarkably, even Toland, the narrator and protagonist, is initially (before his coming out) portrayed as actively racist. In this sub-chapter, I will first focus on *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s rather noteworthy depiction of Toland's internalized racial dominance (DiAngelo 56-59) and his ambivalence and apathy when it comes to matters of racial justice before I analyze how the graphic novel nevertheless ends up portraying openly gay white men as racially innocent.

Whereas *Dykes* draws a sharp distinction between non-racist white lesbians and racist white people 'out there,' for roughly the first two thirds of the story, *Stuck Rubber Baby* does not portray Toland, who, as the reader knows since page 5 of the comic, will eventually come out as gay, as "placed outside of oppression" (Riggs 9). As the early father-to-son talk sequence suggests, Toland is very much a product of the environment he grew up in. The talk between Toland and his parents is directly followed by two panels that symbolize the starting point of his journey towards knowledge of self and others that the comic chronicles (see fig. 12). In the first panel, we see a young Toland picking a book from

derstood in historical, political, social, or cultural terms rather than essentialist ones" (157), i.e. a perspective that recognizes the difference that racism makes in people's lives.

a bookshelf in his parents' living room. The room is meticulously neat, with everything in its proper place. Both the walls of the living room as well as the walls of an adjacent room are covered from floor to ceiling with bookshelves. The narrator comments, "I assumed he [Toland's father] knew what he was talking about because of all the **books** we had in the house" (3). This panel symbolizes the well-ordered world that Toland grew up in, where a white canon of book-knowledge assigns one's proper place in the general order of things and defines what counts as truth. Young Toland trusts these books as well as his father, who, in Toland's mind, is imbued with their authority.

Figure 12



Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* 3

In the next panel, we see the room in disarray, with a teenaged Toland and Melanie kneeling/sitting on the floor among books and open boxes. The bookshelves are almost empty and Toland and Melanie are clearly in the process of packing the books away. Their parents have just died and Toland finds out from Melanie that his father never actually read any of the books he owned. This panel graphically represents the turmoil into which Toland is thrown and the openness and uncertainty of the path ahead. He has to confront the fact that what he thought he knew was based on an illusion. For the first time, he realizes that he might have fallen prey to what Charles M. Mills calls a white "epistemology of ignorance [..., which] precludes self-transparency and genuine understanding of social realities" (Mills 18). His father's books are useless to him now because the knowledge of self and others that he will learn over the course of the graphic

novel has to be experienced and struggled for and cannot be obtained from within the white epistemologies symbolized by the books.

Toland starts out by telling his friends Riley and Mavis, "Gettin' **Clayfield** to **integrate** is like gettin' a **turtle** to walk on its **hind legs** … It's a noble **thought**, but an evolutionary **unlikelihood**" (11), echoing his father's biological explanations of white superiority in his conviction that racial regimes will never change. He repeats these thoughts when he first meets Ginger and tells her that he is "not very **political**" (29) and does not believe that the work of the Biracial Equality League that Ginger participates in will accomplish anything. Even though Ginger convinces Toland to come to one of the meetings with her (33) and even though he gets to know some of Ginger's and Sammy's Black friends, when Ginger's friend Sledge Rankin is killed by the Ku Klux Klan, Toland remains emotionally detached. He tells Ginger, "Let's **face** it – negroes've been gettin' lynched the way **Sledge** got lynched since a long time before **I** arrived on the scene. I'd hear the **stories**, but it wasn't like they had anything to do with **me.** ***I*** wasn't out there burnin' crosses. Maybe I'm **jaded**" (56). In this statement, Toland reveals himself as a signatory of what Mills describes as the Racial Contract, according to which "non-white racial exclusion from personhood was the actual norm" (Mills 122). By calmly accepting the lynching of Black people as simply a part of the way things are that has nothing to do with him, Toland admits that he has not seen Black people as people whose lives matter in the sense that they would "qualify as 'grievable'" (Butler, *Precarious Life* 32) to him. Christa Lebens writes, "Another way that my whiteness is a problem to me, and possibly to my friends, is that, as Patricia Hill Collins says, I don't 'feel the iron' of the pain of racism directly" (77). While no white person can know experientially how it feels to be targeted by racism, Toland's emotional detachment even in the face of outright murder places him at a particularly great distance to the pain that racism causes.

A bit later, in a scene I mentioned earlier, when Esmereldus visits Toland's work place to invite him to the March on Washington for Jobs and Freedom in 1963, the reader learns that the gas station where Toland works does not serve Black people (100). Toland colludes with the racism and cis_hetero_sexism expressed by his boss and colleagues when, after Esmereldus's departure, he "explains" their interaction by saying, "Sorry 'bout that **negro**, Glenn. His **mother** used to clean our **house** for us. He's kind of a **fairy**, but I try to be **nice** to him for **her** sake" (101). Even at this point, halfway through the graphic novel, Toland is not above betraying his friends to secure his place in the straight, white world he grew up in.

Even though Toland does end up going to the March on Washington, the intradiegetic narrator already explained in the beginning of the book that he did not go because he genuinely cared about racism or Black liberation, but because he was still attempting to woo Ginger (6). At the march, his guilt and ambivalence about his own motives keep him from reconnecting with his Black childhood friend Ben (6), whom he had driven away as a boy when his sister Melanie told him not to play with Black children (5). The theme of Toland's ambivalence is continued after the bombing of the Melody Motel when he rushes to the hospital with his friends only to feel left out when he realizes that he does not know anybody there well enough to talk to: "I started getting **depressed** over how out of **place** I felt. And when I considered how damn **typical** it was of me to go into a funk over my **own** general disconnectedness when other people's **children** were **dead** or **bleeding** … it made me even **more** depressed!" (107).

When Toland attends the burial of those killed in the bombing, the eulogy does manage to draw him in emotionally: "I was surprised by how **personally** it was hitting me, considering how I'd scarcely known a **one** of the murdered kids to **speak** to" (115), but he is still unable to sing "We shall overcome" along with the crowd (116). In a later conversation with Ginger, he raises some valid questions: "Who am **I** to sing that song? What dues have **I** paid? **I** haven't helped anybody 'overcome' a fuckin' **thing**! Maybe I'm more **waked up** to some stuff than I was, thanks totally to **you**. The **question** is: Does a **waked-up Toland Polk** do anybody on the planet any **good?**" (118). Unlike the white lesbians in *Dykes*, Toland frequently questions his usefulness as an anti-racist activist. Even though he is actually involved in some activism and even loses his job at the gas station over his decision to attend the funeral, he still recognizes the relative marginality of his contributions.

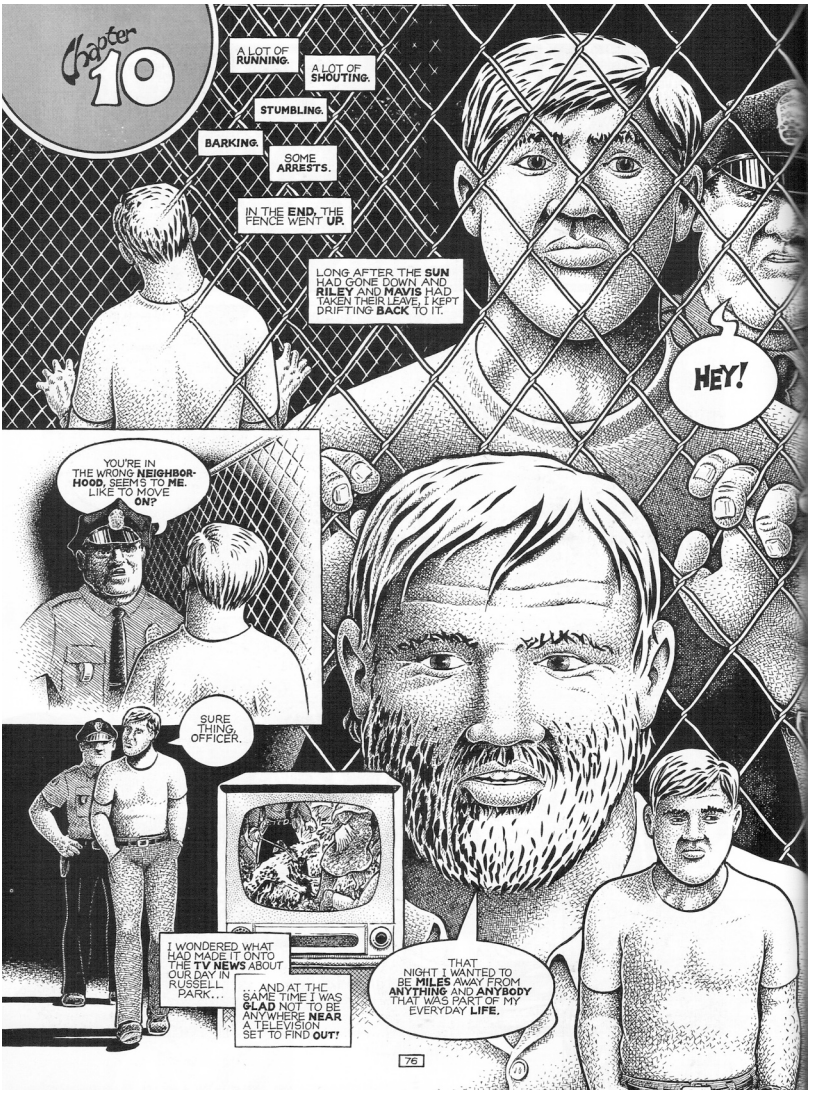
In Yancy's words, one could say that *Stuck Rubber Baby* depicts young Toland in a recurrent process of "un-suturing," which Yancy describes as "a deeply embodied phenomenon that enables whites to come to terms with the realization that their embodied existence and embodied identities are always already inextricably linked to a larger white racist social integument or skin which envelops who and what they are" ("Un-Sutured" xvii). Un-suturing is the opposite of whiteness's usual tendency towards suture, i.e. "the process whereby whites install forms of closure, forms of protection from counter-white axiological and embodied iterations, epistemic fissure, and white normative disruption" (Yancy "Un-Sutured," xv). Yancy also describes this tendency towards suture as "a continuous process of encrustation, a scabbing over, as it were" ("Un-Sutured" xvii) of the wounds opened up by a realization of one's own inextricable implication in white supremacy. *Stuck Rubber Baby* repeatedly shows the young Toland

confronting his own state of being sutured against the pain of racism and trying to tear open the wound of racism again and again.

The process of un-suturing is most vividly encapsulated in an image after Toland finds himself a sudden participant in the protest against the police's attempt to fence in Russell Park, a key site for the convergence of Black protest in the city (64-75). When the protest is over and the police have managed to erect the fence, the narrator recounts, "Long after the **sun** had gone down and **Riley** and **Mavis** had taken their leave, I kept drifting back to it [the fence]" (76, see fig. 13). The fence is a visible symbol of the city's racism. It has torn a gashing wound into the fabric of the city by violently denying Black people their right to gather and issue their demands for justice. While the rest of the city, including his two white friends who accompanied him to the protest, have gone home and have thus already begun the process of allowing the wound of racism to "scab over," Toland still lingers at the fence. As Yancy writes, "one must be prepared to *linger*, to remain, with the truth about one's white self and the truth about how whiteness has structured and continues to structure forms of relationality that are oppressive to people of color" ("Un-Sutured" xv). In the background of a multi-layered full-page bleed, we see a sad and pensive looking Toland physically touching the fence that confronts him with the racist violence that characterizes his hometown and of which he has himself very recently been all but blithely unaware (cf. 11).

He is pictured twice, touching the fence, once looking at the reader and once facing away from the reader. The fence is also drawn twice, one fence visually layered on top of the other, giving the impression of Toland being fenced in as in a cage. He remains caught in the violence he has witnessed, unable to turn away from it and also unable to see his way out of it. He has become un-sutured and for a moment he lingers with the pain and uncertainty that comes with being opened up to the violence one is entangled in. The moment does not last very long because in another layer on the very same page, a white police officer approaches Toland for being "in the wrong **neighborhood**" (76), thus reinforcing the separation between Black and white while simultaneously shooing Toland away from the actual, physical site of this violent physical separation. The police officer in this moment embodies an official white supremacy that attempts to hide its workings by concealing its foundational violence. He cuts short Toland's moment of un-suturing by effectively telling him, "There is nothing to see here," thus trying to uphold white epistemologies of ignorance by preventing Toland from fully experiencing the pain that might lead from ignorance to consciousness.

Figure 13



Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* 76

The focus of *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s early chapters on white participants of the Civil Rights Movement as complicit, conflicted, and awkwardly attempting a disentanglement from white supremacy is quite intentional. In an interview with the German newspaper *Die Süddeutsche*, Cruse stated, "I cannot say what it

means to be African American and I was never a leading figure in any protest movement. Through my experiences in the gay movement, I rather felt called to portray the foot soldiers instead of the leaders"[6] (Wüllner). In the introduction to *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s anniversary edition, Bechdel offers an assessment of Cruse's attempt to portray white people who were marginal participants in the Civil Rights Movement that agrees with my reading of the early chapters of the book: "This is not a revisionist fantasy in which the white hero flings himself wholeheartedly into the Civil Rights Movement. Toland's transformation is tentative, conflicted, alternately self-flagellating and self-serving – it's a scathingly honest portrayal" (n. pag.).

It is noteworthy that this storyline also differs substantially from common tropes in Hollywood films of the same time. Jennifer Pierce analyzed Hollywood films about race from the late 1980s and throughout the 1990s and found that these films predominantly "told stories about elite white men who underwent a transformation from racial innocence to racial understanding and became advocates who fought for racial justice. In doing so, these benevolent white men typically 'saved' people of color from the ignorant violence of white, working-class vigilantes" (45). The white hero usually did so "through his relentless work in normative systems of justice [..., which were] portrayed as fundamentally fair" (48). On the flipside, "such films depicted people of color as passive or ineffectual victims: a portrait that reinforced white paternalism and erased black struggles for justice" (56). Given how popular these stories were at the time that Cruse was writing *Stuck Rubber Baby*, it is even more remarkable that Cruse managed to write about a white person's confrontation with racism in a strikingly different way. It is obvious, not just from the interview in *Die Süddeutsche* and remarks he made in his talk at the *Queers and Comics* conference in 2015 but also from the unflinching way in which the graphic novel portrays white racist entanglement, that Cruse's choice of a white protagonist is not based in a desire to re-center and exonerate whiteness but in a commitment to write about what one knows and an honest recognition that a white author will never fully know what it was like to be Black in the early 1960s in Birmingham. Toland did not start out as racially innocent and he never becomes a leader, let alone a 'savior' of Black people. He is, at best, an ambivalent supporter. Even though Black people are not at the center of *Stuck Rubber Baby*, they are truthfully and re-

6 "Ich kann nicht sagen, was es bedeutet, Afroamerikaner zu sein und ich war niemals eine führende Figur in irgendeiner Protestbewegung. Durch die Erfahrungen in der Schwulenbewegung fühlte ich mich mehr dazu berufen, die Fußsoldaten zu porträtieren statt der Führungspersönlichkeiten."

spectfully portrayed as the unequivocal leaders of the Civil Rights Movement, who have much to teach their white supporters. Their movement is clearly shown as a collective effort because the comic recognizes that the system, including the justice system, in the South in the 1960s is not "fundamentally fair" but actually fundamentally racist. In this unjust white system, there is no space for paternalistic white savior figures.

Despite its nuanced portrayal of Toland's first steps at disentangling himself from the racism he grew up with, however, *Stuck Rubber Baby* unfortunately does not manage to sustain the tension of Toland's repeated racial "un-suturing" for the duration of the graphic novel. Instead, it offers a rather abrupt closure two thirds of the way through when Toland has his first sexual encounter with a man. The story of his one-night stand with Les is narrated like a conversion story that lays the groundwork for his transformation into a non-racist openly gay white man.

After a chance meeting at Shiloh's hospital bed, Les flirts with Toland and convinces him to have sex with him in a motel room. Once they are safely inside the room, Les remarks that it has started to rain outside. The extradiegetic narrator visually emphasizes the metaphorical importance of the rain by grouping all six panels depicting the sex act between Toland and Les around a central panel showing the rain pouring down outside their motel room (138, see fig. 14). Toland's first time having sex with a man is like the rain finally falling after the clouds have built up slowly over a long, humid day. It is the release of a tension that has been building over the entire story up until that point. Toland's first explicitly sexual gay encounter partakes in the rain's cleansing qualities. It turns tension into "**contentment**" (138) and washes away all of Toland's doubts and insecurities about his same-sex desires.

The water, however, does not only symbolize Toland's gay baptism, his coming into himself as a gay man by finally acting on the same-sex desire he has felt and scrupulously hidden for many years, it also takes on a racial meaning that hinges on the fact that Les is Black. The water metaphor is further extended on the next page, when Les takes a shower after they had sex. The narrator comments, "Listening to the **water** spraying in the bathroom I thought about **another** black playmate I'd once had … and about another **bath**" (139). Toland then recounts a story from his childhood when he played with his Black friend, Ben, and they decided to swap clothes to see how long it would take Ben's father, Stetson, who works as a gardener for Toland's parents, to notice that they were wearing each other's clothes. Their game takes an unexpected turn as Toland's mother and sister return home before Toland and Ben can even show themselves to Stetson. Their reactions to the clothes swap are fraught with rac-

ism. Toland's mother first accuses Ben of trying to steal Toland's clothes, but when she sees Toland wearing Ben's clothes, she orders him to take them off and take a bath immediately, before putting on fresh clothes. Melanie, meanwhile, shouts, "**Toland's wearin' n*** clothes!**" (140) and is quickly slapped across the face by her mother for using a racial slur. While Toland is ordered to "**Scrub** [him]self **good**" (emphases in the original), Ben is told to change back into his own clothes in the carport because he is not allowed into the house.

Figure 14

Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* 138

The story once again encapsulates the contradictory socialization into a segregated system of white supremacy that Toland received at the hands of his pseudo-progressive parents. While Toland's mother swiftly punishes the use of overtly racist terms, she simultaneously reinforces a quasi-religious adherence to deeply racist notions of white purity in danger of being sullied by blackness, or as DiAngelo puts it: "The message was clear to me: if a colored person touched something, it became dirty" (193). Without spelling it out for him explicitly, To-

land's mother teaches him that blackness carries an almost metaphysical threat of pollution and that he is to avoid close contact with Black people.

The intradiegetic narrator finishes the story of the clothes swap with a series of questions: "It was **confusing**. I couldn't see where all the **urgency** was coming from. Why did I have to take a bath **that very minute? Why** was it so **important?**" (141, see fig. 15). These questions already hint at Toland's comparative racial innocence. Even though young Toland himself enforces his mother's rule "**discourag**[ing him] from bringing Ben **inside** the **house**" (139) by conducting the original clothes swap in the carport, it is implied that Toland is only following a rule he does not understand. The racist message is apparently not clear to him. Unlike his mother and sister, he does not think of Ben's clothes as 'dirty' or 'unfit' for him and he does not understand why he suddenly has to take a bath in the middle of the day when he could simply continue playing with Ben. Toland's comparative innocence is further corroborated when his memories of the clothes swap segue into three almost identical mid shots of Toland lying naked on his bed, thinking (see fig. 15). When he whispers "Mama …" (141) in the second of these panels, it can be assumed that, in the narrative silence created by these panels, Toland finally understands why his mother insisted on him taking a bath all these many years ago. These panels as well as the last panels of the story he remembers are once again grouped around a central water image, this time of a shower head, thus creating an even closer link among the bath Toland once had to take for racist reasons, the sex he just had that confirmed both his same-sex desire and his closeness with Black people, and the shower Les is currently taking that will end up washing Toland free from the 'sin' of his racism (see fig. 15).

In the last panel from this group, the decision Toland makes in light of his memories of how he was socialized into white supremacy is symbolized by him getting up from the bed and turning his back to his past. He then steps from darkness to light in the next panel when he moves from the gloomy bedroom to the brightly lit bathroom (see fig. 15). In a curious reversal of W.E.B. Du Bois's observation that a "vast veil" ("Souls" 1730) separates Black people from white people, Toland removes the veil of racism that separates *him* from Black people in the form of the shower curtain that obscures Les's form. Whereas Du Bois likens the veil of racism to a "prison-house" for Black people, the walls of which are "relentlessly narrow, tall, and unscalable to sons of night" ("Souls" 1730), Toland can apparently remove the barriers between himself and Black people by his own volition. Once he moves the shower curtain out of the way, he and Les embrace in a panel without a frame. In a symbolic return to a lost paradise of innocence, they are as naked as Adam and Eve before the fall and their lovingly

entwined bodies break the frame of racial segregation that was imposed on them by their white elders.

Figure 15

Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* 141

Under the cleansing water of the shower, Toland is reunited with the Black playmate his mother's ideology of racial purity separated him from. Toland's return to the innocence of his younger self, suggesting a clothes swap with his

Black friend, is complete when Les embraces him, saying, "Let's rub a little **soap** on this white boy's skin" (141, see fig. 15). Making explicit reference to Toland's race, Les metaphorically washes Toland clean of the 'sin' of racism. Being washed by Les is the antidote to the solitary bath ordered by Toland's racist mother. While Toland's mother thought her son needed cleaning after an imagined pollution through his Black friend's clothes, it is his Black lover's embrace that absolves him of the actual 'sin' of racism. Whereas his mother's racism left him sitting confused in his bathtub, scrubbing_hugging himself in a forlorn gesture of loneliness, Les ends the loneliness imposed by racism by scrubbing_hugging him with exactly the same gesture that now turns into a symbol of Black and white unity.

Racism thus becomes an 'episode' in Toland's life, something that was imposed on him from the outside and that remains on the outside, never shaping the core of who he is and understands himself to be as a person. Taking a shower with Les brings him full-circle, restoring the innocence of the white boy who is good and non-racist at heart. The metaphor of the water, both rain and shower, intimately connects Toland's first sexual encounter with a Black man to his leaving behind his old racist self. From this point on, he is a changed man: Sure of his same-sex desire, he is also simultaneously freed from his racism. This depiction of the sexual encounter between Les and Toland re-inscribes highly problematic discourses claiming that white people who are friends with or have sex with People of Color cannot, therefore, be racist. In this instance, *Stuck Rubber Baby* instrumentalizes interracial sex both as cause and proof of Toland's racial innocence.

Toland's gay, anti-racist baptism symbolically marks a turning point in the narrative. From this point onward, Toland is never again shown as acting out any of the racism he learned from childhood on. For as long as Toland struggles with his secret desire for men, he also struggles with his internalized racial dominance. As soon as he takes his first step towards becoming a sexually active, openly gay man, however, his struggle with racism is apparently simultaneously resolved. Within the story-world of *Stuck Rubber Baby*, it seems to be imaginable that closeted white gay men might still have to grapple with their own racism, but not that people who live openly as gays and lesbians (and therefore face oppression themselves) could also still partake in the oppression of others. The figure of Sammy, who is introduced both as an out gay man and as exceptionally 'down with' Black people from the beginning of the story (see below), further underscores this subtle connection between being an openly gay white man and being non-racist.

Toland's and Les's embrace under the shower also marks the end point of Toland's ambivalent engagement with the Civil Rights Movement. Whereas Toland's and Les's one-night stand only came about because both of them were visiting Shiloh in the hospital after the Melody Motel bombing, the last third of the graphic novel focuses exclusively on Ginger's pregnancy and Sammy's murder. It is almost as if the Civil Rights Movement has fulfilled its narrative function as a catalyst for Toland's awakening consciousness when Toland simultaneously accepts his homosexuality and overcomes his racism in Les's arms. From that point onward, racism cedes its central place in the story to cis_hetero_sexism.

In addition to confirming many of the existing critiques of 'gay is the new Black' discourses, *Stuck Rubber Baby* thus also shows how these discourses ultimately serve to establish LGBTIQ white people as racially innocent. It is immediately apparent that every time someone proclaims that 'gay is the new Black' and thus claims that racism has already been successfully abolished, white people in general are also implicitly positioned as racially innocent because, where there is no more racism, there can also be no more racists. While the graphic novel does not make this claim for all white people, it does suggest that gay white men, once they live openly and thus become potential targets of cis_hetero_sexist violence, become racially innocent.

When *Stuck Rubber Baby* equates racism and cis_hetero_sexism through the motif of the crushed head and through Toland's declaration that he could have been killed just like Sammy or Emmett Till or injured like Shiloh, it creates a category of undifferentiated 'victimhood' that equally encompasses gay white men and Black people. If cis_hetero_sexist violence and racist violence are the same and if gay white men like Sammy and Toland are first and foremost (potential and actual) victims of this homogenized violence, they cannot simultaneously come into view as perpetrators of that same violence. It becomes impossible to see both their victimization as gay men and their racial domination as white men at the same time. As *Stuck Rubber Baby* shows, equating racism and cis_hetero_sexism and imagining gay white men as potential victims of an undifferentiated 'violence' ultimately renders the intersections between privilege and oppression unimaginable.

In the following sub-chapter, I will explore another problematic dimension of 'gay is the new Black' discourses that follows both from the idea that white LGBTIQ people and People of Color face the same kind of violence and from the presumed racial innocence of openly LGBTIQ white people: Both of these assumptions suggest that white LGBTIQ people and People of Color (regardless of their gender and sexuality) will be easy, even 'natural' comrades in the strug-

gle against oppression. It is tempting for white LGBTIQ people to imagine a conflict-free camaraderie across the color line that neglects the very real tensions and separations that typically ensue when people who are variously positioned as targeted by or benefiting from and upholding different types of oppression attempt to be in community with one another.

4.6.2 Post-Racial Gay Revisionism: Where Is the Conflict?

Similar to *Dykes*, *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s portrayal of openly gay men as racially innocent also leads the graphic novel to stretch the limits of historical plausibility when it comes to the closeness and friendliness of Black and white contact. Whereas, for the first two thirds of the story, even the central white characters are shown to be, at times, emotionally detached, doubtful of their motives and effectiveness as anti-racist activists, dangerously naïve and reckless, even outright racist, none of these behaviors ever seem to stand between them and their Black friends. *Stuck Rubber Baby* resembles *Dykes* in the way that racism never seems to intrude into friendships or cause any conflict between the well-meaning protagonists.

There are only a handful of instances in which Black people react negatively to the white protagonists on account of their whiteness. The first of these occurs at a mixed party that Toland attends at Sammy's invitation. Toland is in the middle of a conversation with a Black couple, who jokingly tell him that the racist antics of the police commissioner and the Ku Klux Klan make for good press for the Civil Rights Movement, when their laughter is interrupted by a severe looking Black man called Raeburn who is suspicious of Toland's presence at the party, "I ain't never **seen** this dude before. Have **you?** How do we know he ain't with the **cops**, workin' **undercover?**" (27, see fig. 16). In the first panel on page 27, Raeburn is shown as temporarily disrupting the cozy familiarity between Toland and the couple by physically stepping between them and creating a distance between Toland on the one side and the couple on the other. In the very next panel, however, their coziness is reestablished, as the three of them form a front against Raeburn, defending Toland's trustworthiness and almost crowding Raeburn out of the left side of the panel. The older Toland, who narrates this story, starts the account of this conversation by commenting that Raeburn "made [him] **nervous**" (26), thus centering his own feelings and further corroborating the impression that *Raeburn*'s nervousness around Toland is unfounded and surprising.

Figure 16

Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* 27

The other instances occur after the bombing of the Melody Motel. All the main characters are at the Rhombus when Rev. Pepper alerts them to what has happened. While Toland, Sammy, and Ginger decide to go find out if Shiloh is okay, Mavis and Riley drive home immediately because they fear that many Black people will be very angry at white people after the bombing and that it will therefore not be safe for them to be seen in public (105). At the hospital, Toland is indeed confronted with Black anger at whiteness. As he walks through the hallway, he hears a Black boy say, "They **killed** him, mama! Some **white men** went an' **killed** Joab!" (107, see fig. 17). As Toland looks back at the boy and his mother, the mother looks at him. She then turns to the boy to tell him that he cannot know if the murderers were really white men, but the boy, who is now looking directly at Toland, is undeterred and confirms, "Yes, I **do**" (107). Under the boy's defiant, angry stare and the mother's sad gaze, Toland turns back around and walks away.

In this sequence, the extradiegetic narrator alternates silent panels with panels that contain speech bubbles, thus slowing down narrated time and marking the moment in which Toland's white masculinity becomes conspicuous and suspicious. As Richard Dyer writes in the introduction of his seminal work on representations of whiteness, "whites [...] are placed as the norm, the ordinary, the standard. Whites are everywhere in representation. Yet precisely because of this and their placing as norm they seem not to be represented to themselves *as* whites but as people who are variously gendered, classed, sexualized and abled" (3). Whereas whiteness is typically unmarked and invisible to white people, the

boy's words and his gaze mark Toland's whiteness. bell hooks writes about the Black gaze: "An effective strategy of white supremacist terror and dehumanization during slavery centered around white control of the black gaze. Black slaves [...] could be brutally punished for looking, for appearing to observe the whites they were serving, as only a subject can observe [...]. To look directly was an assertion of subjectivity, equality" (168). Both the boy and his mother assert their subjectivity and equality in looking at Toland and seeing not his individual personality but his whiteness. In their looking at him, he becomes visible to himself and to the reader *as* white and his whiteness appears as the whiteness that Black people "associate [...] with the terrible, the terrifying, the terrorizing" (hooks 170). Toland turns away from their gaze because he understands that his white presence is not wanted. For a moment, the violence of white supremacy is reflected back at Toland, but *Stuck Rubber Baby* does not sustain this moment for long. In turning away, Toland runs into Rev. Pepper, who invites him into the privacy and confidence of his short solitary break in the hospital's staircase (108). Toland's momentary sense of being out of place is quickly assuaged by the acceptance and trust Rev. Pepper gifts to him.

Figure 17

Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* 107

In a scene I already mentioned above, Toland is in the car with Sammy and Ginger on their way back from the hospital after the bombing when a Black man throws a rock at their car (113). The rock throwing could potentially be understood as a legitimate expression of Black rage at white people after a night of racist violence. However, as I argued above, the motif of the cracked head actually equates the violence of the thrown rock with the deadly violence faced by Black people. The comic does not side with the anger of the Black man but with the fear of the white people in the car, who, for once, feel threatened because of

the color of their skin (Toland: "Jesus! My skin's **never** felt so **white!**" [113]). Toland's white innocence in the face of an 'unreasonable' attack on their car is further established by the fact that the cracking of the windowpane interrupts Toland's recollection of a moment of Black and white intimacy. Rev. Pepper demonstrated extraordinary trust in Toland when he told him that despite him being a prominent leader of non-violent resistance, he still enjoyed how Mabel, one of his parishioners, used a brick to beat back a police dog at the Russell Park protest. The intimacy of the moment is expressed in the way Rev. Pepper frames his words, "I'll tell you a **secret**, son. Don't you tell **anybody** I **said** this, though" (113). Juxtaposing the rock throwing with this specific memory once again qualifies the anger expressed by an anonymous Black man by insisting that while Toland and his friends are white, they are still *personally* trustworthy; they are allowed to "be[] and feel[] like [...] good white person[s]" (A. Thompson 15), innocent victims of an unjustified attack.

Apart from these few experiences in which their whiteness erects a barrier between them and some Black people, Toland and his white friends are always shown as being enthusiastically embraced by all the Black people they encounter. When Toland first meets Sammy, Sammy immediately establishes his credentials as "Tiffany, friend of people of color" (A. Thompson 8). He pulls out a record by Anna Dellyne, Rev. Pepper's wife, who used to be a singer before marrying the reverend, and explains to Toland, "**Mavis** and **I** may be the only white people in **Clayfield** who have this record, pal" (16). He proceeds to tell Toland that he is friends with her son, Les, thus presenting himself as a good white person who is 'in the know' and 'down with' Black people. The intradiegetic narrator portrays Ginger as equally prone to emphasizing her close ties to Black people: "Ginger liked to tell how Sledge had driven to Clayfield and practically **kidnapped** Shiloh and her to get them to perform at a **rally** [...]. Afterwards they'd gone back to Sledge's **home** for a **chicken dinner** topped off with **blackberry cobbler**. It was a visit that left everybody feeling like they'd all been **reared** in the same **cradle**, according to Ginger" (51, see fig. 18). This story 'proves' that Ginger not only performs together with a Black movement organizer but is actually in high demand with other Black political organizers as well, who gladly invite her into their homes and share their food with her. The expression "reared in the same cradle" erases all differences between Black and white people and portrays Ginger as practically a part of the family, completely safe and innocent, her whiteness all but forgotten. The accompanying image also shows a smiling Ginger in the middle of the panel, surrounded by equally smiling and welcoming Black people. The image suggests that Ginger is not only a temporary and marginal guest but rather at the heart of this Black community.

The fact that she "liked to tell" this story underlines her own investment in being seen as the good white Civil Rights activist, who is entirely accepted by Black people. In uncritically retelling her story as a way to explain who Sledge was and how Ginger was connected to him, the narrator gives further credence to this description of Ginger.

Figure 18

Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* 51

In *Stuck Rubber Baby*, Black women play a particularly important role in welcoming white people into Black spaces and making them feel accepted. When Toland attends his first mixed party at the Melody Motel, he meets "**Marge** and **Effie**, a lesbian couple who told me they ran a **nightclub** located on the city's outskirts. It was mainly for **blacks**, but **anybody friendly** was welcome" (26). They initially assume that Toland is gay, but even when he tells them that he is straight, they still welcome him with open arms and insist that he should visit the Rhombus, the gay bar downtown. Even though, for all intents and purposes, Toland is a straight white male stranger for Effie and Marge, they have no reservations towards him at all and immediately accept him as a welcome presence in both LGBTIQ and Black spaces. Marge, Effie, and Effie's sister Mabel continue to build bridges between Toland and his white friends and the Black community in Clayfield on several occasions (cf. 45; 66; 83; 136). In the end, after Sammy's murder, "Mabel, Marge and Effie decided they'd throw a **party** at **Alleysax** where we could all **remember** Sammy – and say **goodbye** to him – **together**" (184). The three Black women once again facilitate community, a conflict-free togetherness, among Black and white, gay and straight people, which ends up

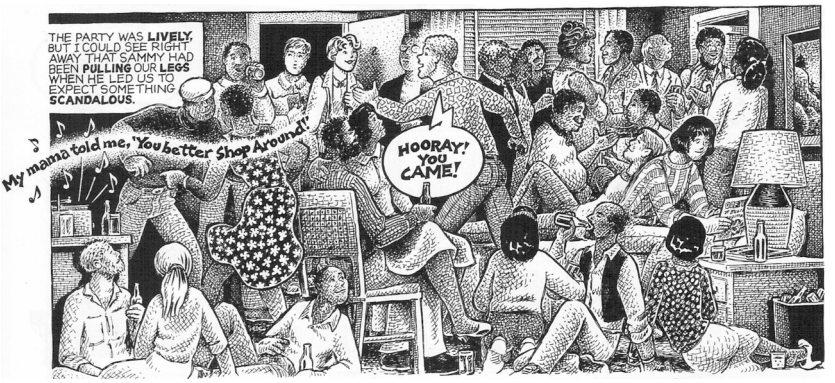
serving as the stage for Toland's public coming out. The panel accompanying the narration shows the Alleysax as a bright beacon of light in the darkness, attracting a diverse crowd of people, who are all flocking towards the welcoming space that Mabel, Marge, and Effie provide.

As I already mentioned above, the character of Anna Dellyne fulfills a very similar narrative function. It is especially the possession of her recorded music that marks first Sammy and Mavis and later Toland as 'good whites' who are intimately connected to Black culture and activism. Over the course of the story, she also becomes a personal confidante to Ginger and Toland, providing Ginger with information about (illegal) abortion providers (129) and encouraging Toland to come out and not rush into marriage with Ginger (131ff). In the end, she becomes something like a mother figure to Toland when she gives her blessing on his coming out. In the second to last panel of the graphic novel, when the older Toland 'visits' her via listening to her music, it is almost as if she and the Rev. Pepper have become more accepting, Black versions of his deceased parents (208f).

When Sammy drives to his white parents to confront them and ask for money after many years of being shunned by them, the family's Black maid joyously greets him at the door. Her physical embrace and her readiness to celebrate Sammy's return regardless of what has happened in the past stand in sharp contrast to the shocked, hostile reactions of his parents (160f). In this scene, *Stuck Rubber Baby* again postulates an easy, 'natural' closeness between Black women and openly gay white men. The depiction of the Black woman who has worked as a maid for many years in Sammy's family is reminiscent of the racist "mammy stereotype," a stereotype "ideologically focused on caring for a white child. As a black woman [in the pre-Civil Rights era], the mammy was confined by a system that mandated that she provide 'loving care' to white children" (Robinson 56). This scene erases the actual physical and economic exploitation of a Black woman by a white family and instead substitutes a white-washed depiction of harmonious community between gay white people and Black people, facilitated by cheerful, loving Black women, who welcome gay white people with open arms. Apart from the woman who works for Sammy's family, the other Black women in the graphic novel are not literally portrayed as "mammies," i.e. "the fantasied jolly, fat, black woman who works as a nanny, cook, or housekeeper (or in any of those roles) for a white family to whom she is devoted" (St. John 131). Nevertheless, their depiction as perennially cheerful, wise, and unquestioningly supportive of the white central characters clearly echoes racist fantasies of the 'Black mammy.'

Stuck Rubber Baby's vision of a utopian community in which differences of race and sexuality cease to matter finds its clearest expression in its depiction of mixed parties. Toland first comes into contact with Black and white Civil Rights activists and LGBTIQ people at an integrated party that takes place at the Melody Motel, an important meeting place for people involved in the Civil Rights Movement. When Toland and Mavis arrive at the party, they step into a motel room chock-full of mostly Black people but also some whites, standing, sitting, lounging around, engaged in lively conversations, drinking, listening to music, dancing (24, see fig. 19). The overall impression rendered by the wide panel depicting the party is of a warm, relaxed, welcoming space, where everybody feels comfortable. It is at this party that Toland first meets Ginger, Les, Shiloh, Marge and Effie, as well as Raeburn and the Black couple engaged in Civil Rights activism. It is also the first time that Toland sees Sammy and Les dancing with each other. The narrator comments, "I'd never **seen** two men doin' a **slow dance** together before … much **less** one of 'em **white** and one of 'em **black**" (25). Occurring early in the novel, the image of Sammy's and Les's entwined bodies sets the tone for *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s depiction of gay and lesbian spaces as always already mixed race and mixed-race spaces as automatically gay-friendly.

Figure 19



Cruse, *Stuck Rubber Baby* 24

This impression is strengthened when Toland and his friends first visit the Rhombus, Clayfield's only gay bar. Here, the majority of patrons are white, with a few Black people thrown into the mix (41). At one point during their visit, Toland overhears one white guy say to another, "This place has sure gone **downhill** since they started lettin' so many **n***s** in" (41). The narrator then recounts,

My first thought was, who wants to hear bullshit like **that**? My **next** thought was, how come I wasn't hearing it **more**? There was **Les Pepper**, gossiping with **Sammy** … and **Esmereldus** (out of drag tonight) was camping it up with **Rex**, the **bartender**. There were more **whites** than **Blacks** there by **far**, but you still couldn't call the joint anything but **integrated**. How come nobody was fighting any **race wars** in the **Rhombus**? Didn't they know that **'hallowed Southern traditions'** were in danger of **toppling**? Where were the **rednecks**? Where were the **cops**? (44)

This sequence begins by exposing the existence of racism among gay white people but quickly qualifies the racist comment as a stray occurrence, an exception to the rule of post-raciality in the gay and lesbian community. Overhearing the racist comment serves as nothing more than an opportunity for Toland to highlight the exceptional lack of racism in the overall gay and lesbian community. At first, this depiction of gay and lesbian spaces as generally non-racist might appear strange, given *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s nuanced portrayal of Toland's struggles with the racism and white apathy he internalized as a white boy growing up in the 1950s in the South. However, the close association that the comic establishes during the last third of the story between living as an openly gay man and being racially innocent – a potential victim of a homogenized racist-cis_hetero_sexist violence, not its perpetrator – retroactively 'explains' why *Stuck Rubber Baby* imagines LGBTIQ spaces as not only interracial but also largely free of racial conflict. This portrayal betrays the hope of white LGBTIQ people that one's own racism will be 'cured' once one comes out (and is intimate with Black people).

This white longing for a post-racial LGBTIQ community has a concrete anchor in Cruse's own experiences. In "The Long and Winding Stuck Rubber Road," Cruse writes, "One experience that had had a big impact on me when I was around twenty was being taken to a black after-hours club on Birmingham's fringes where gays were welcomed, even though it was not a gay club, and where whites and blacks mingled with no noticeable tensions, even though racial strife was out of control in other parts of the culture." Worried that readers might not believe that such a place could have existed in the South during the early 1960s, Cruse sought (and found) confirmation of its existence from other patrons who had frequented the club. The existence of this club and the validation of Cruse's experience of gay interracial harmony there serve as a license for *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s portrayal of the parties at the Melody Motel, the Rhombus, and the Alleysax, the fictional counterpart of the club Cruse frequented in Birmingham.

Josh Flanagan's review of *Stuck Rubber Baby* for *iFanboy* confirms the appeal of its portrayal of mixed Black and white, straight and gay spaces: "Every once in a while, I'd be reading a scene full of people who are all so accepting of one another [...] and think maybe this isn't the way it was, and I'm not sure if that's the case, but I'd like to think that this really happened." Without discounting Cruse's own experience and the experiences of those who confirmed his memories, it might be more realistic to assume that while it was certainly possible for people separated by racism and cis_hetero_sexism to get along with each other in the South during the early 1960s, those experiences probably represent stray occurrences rather than a general norm.

Even though the subjects in Howard's study, *Men Like That*, do confirm homosexual encounters across the color line, Howard also describes these encounters as much less boisterous and easy-going than they appear in *Stuck Rubber Baby*:

> Parallel black and white queer realms cautiously intermingled after the early sixties [...]. Whereas before, same-sex interracial intercourse usually involved advances by white men of privilege on their black class subordinates, desegregation enabled more – if seldom more egalitarian – interactions across the racial divide. Obstacles remained; racism persisted. In Jackson, though formal barriers eased, a queer boy out on the town could still expect to choose between the white bar and the black bar – located, at the end of the period, directly across the street from one another. (xvi)

One of the subjects in James T. Sears's study on pre-Stonewall Charleston similarly characterizes the 1960s as a period when "gay men did not *date* blacks, and we certainly didn't 'marry' them. Sex between black and white men was *always* behind closed doors" (184). Also, of the more than 70 Black gay men from various generations and regions in the South that E. Patrick Johnson interviewed for his book, *Sweet Tea*, none report experiences that were even remotely similar to the easy Black and white companionship in *Stuck Rubber Baby*. Quite to the contrary, many of them speak of separation and hostility between Black and white people in general as well as between Black and white gay men. D.C., who was born in 1951 in Shreveport, Louisiana, for example, states, "Growing up, I didn't care nothing at all for a white person because they were considered the enemy [...]. There was also this little thing that was still going around that, as a black young man, you were not supposed to look up at a white lady in the face [...]. And so I basically always saw the white person as the evil spirit" (E. Johnson 69).

Even Tim'm, who was born in Little Rock, Arkansas roughly ten years after the main events in *Stuck Rubber Baby*, still reports, "My family didn't really trust white people [...]. And the only reason whites and blacks interacted was because they were sort of federally enforced. Otherwise people wouldn't have chose to, didn't want to" (E. Johnson 93). When E. Patrick Johnson specifically asked his interview partners whether there was a lot of interaction between Black and white people in the gay communities they were familiar with, R. Dioneaux responded, "As opposed to anywhere else? I would say, as others have said and I'm sure you've heard this before, unless it's a very sexy issue, unless it's a hot-button issue, unless you need a couple of black drag queens for color commentary, no. It is just as segregated as the general community" (E. Johnson 381).

In his study of gay and lesbian life in Arkansas, Brock Thompson describes how racial segregation played out in the context of gay club life during the mid 20th century:

> White and heterosexual bars, roadhouses, and honkytonks could remain white and certainly heterosexual by using devices ranging from required membership to outright intimidation toward would-be black patrons. However, with only one gay bar for miles around, many queer Arkansans could not afford to be so selective when it came to race and social space, nor did they necessarily wish to be. At first glance, a newcomer might applaud the queer setting as varied in its makeup. However, once inside, they would find the interior space of the bar even more segregated than most public spaces in the American South. According to Jones, blacks knew their corner, and whites knew theirs. Rarely did they mingle, and rarely would they dance together. Even more rarely still would they leave the bar with one another. (58)

Recounting a visit from a cousin from the North during the mid 1980s, one of Sears's Black interview partners in *Growing Up Gay in the South* describes an almost identical set-up: "When we got to the disco he started to ask me questions. Like, 'Why are all the blacks on this side and the whites over here?' I told him, 'That's just the way it is. You're down south. We do it subconsciously whether we're gay, heterosexual, or whatever. We do it in restaurants, on the job, in churches, and at the bars'" (137f).

Virtually all of these studies agree that even though the Civil Rights Movement did allow for gay encounters across the color line, most gay spaces in the South tended to remain de facto segregated, even if, for lack of alternatives, Black and white people often frequented the same places. As Boykin puts it, since "white gay people are just as racist as white straight people" (234), they

are thus directly responsible for the "horror [... of] racism within white gay communities in the South" (E. Johnson 6), which in turn causes many Black gay men to be deeply suspicious of white gay men.

Stuck Rubber Baby downplays these dynamics in favor of a utopian portrayal of Black and white harmony that is largely facilitated by cheerful, wise, and welcoming Black women. Similar to *Dykes*, it thus satisfies a white longing for easy racial reconciliation in LGBTIQ spaces without recognizing the persistence of structural and interpersonal racism in these spaces that cannot be wished away or be overcome by good intentions alone. These portrayals allow white LGBTIQ people to see the absence of People of Color from many LGBTIQ spaces and movements as purely accidental and to remain comfortable in the belief that if LGBTIQ People of Color only chose to frequent these (white) spaces or participate in these (white) movements, we would, of course, all get along with each other. They leave white LGBTIQ people ill prepared for the conflict that usually ensues when we attempt to be in community with People of Color and for the work we need to do to curb our racism so that People of Color can actually be relaxed in our presence and trust our political commitments.

4.6.3 The Problem(s) with Gay Visibility Politics

The last problematic dimension of *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s adoption of 'gay is the new Black' discourses that I want to address here lies in the actual LGBTIQ politics that the comic promotes and performs. If LGBTIQ politics are imagined as superseding anti-racist politics, which are positioned as successful in the past and therefore no longer (as) necessary, it is quite likely that the LGBTIQ politics proposed will not be particularly intersectional and will instead lean more towards a single-issue approach to LGBTIQ activism. I would argue that *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s main political investment lies in gay visibility politics and in this sub-chapter I will investigate in how far these politics can actually be seen as non-intersectional and benefitting primarily the interests of white LGBTIQ people.

Stuck Rubber Baby's investment in gay visibility politics is already implicit in its format as a graphic novel centered on gay characters. Beyond this implicit investment in visibility politics, which *Stuck Rubber Baby* shares with virtually all LGBTIQ comics, it also explicitly centers visibility politics through its narrative structure. Its main narrative impetus lies in the tension that it establishes by contrasting an openly and comfortably gay narrator with his younger, uncomfortably closeted self (for a pointed articulation of that tension, see page 6 of the comic). This tension is finally resolved during Toland's climactic speech at

Sammy's memorial service, during which he publicly comes out as gay for the first time. The entire graphic novel can, in fact, be read as the intradiegetic narrator's extended coming out story. The high premium that *Stuck Rubber Baby* places on coming out as a political strategy is further emphasized by the narrator's display of the ACT UP slogan "silence = death" in the apartment he shares with his partner (207). If silence equals death, then retelling (and visualizing) the story of one's coming into speech as a gay man must conversely mean life. From his first public coming out as a gay young man to his performance as an ACT UP activist who creates gay visibility by sharing his coming out story, Toland is thus consistently portrayed as deeply invested in the politics of increasing gay visibility.

Culturally speaking, he shares this political strategy with many LGBTIQ activists since "[d]emanding visibility has been one of the principles of late-twentieth-century identity politics, and flaunting visibility has become one of its tactics. If silence equals death, invisibility is nonexistence" (Walker 1). Johanna Schaffer confirms the importance of visibility politics not only for the U.S. context but also for Europe and states that their influence in Europe extends far beyond LGBTIQ contexts: "*Visibility* is one of the classic topoi of feminist, antiracist, Black/migrant and lesbigaytrans political rhetorics and in the rhetorics of these leftist-activist minoritized politics it is consistently valued positively"[7] ("(Un)Formen" 60). Judith Butler warns of the dire consequences of unintelligibility when she writes, "To find that you are fundamentally unintelligible [...] is to find that you have not yet achieved access to the human, to find yourself speaking only and always *as if you were* human, but with the sense that you are not, to find that your language is hollow, that no recognition is forthcoming because the norms by which recognition takes place are not in your favor" (*Undoing Gender* 30). While unintelligibility is not the same as invisibility, the two are closely connected in that unintelligibility articulates a fundamental lack of any kind of frame of reference (verbal, visual, conceptual) through which one could recognize oneself or be recognized by others. According to Butler, achieving visibility through self-representation is one of the central strategies to mitigate this situation:

> When we consider the ordinary ways that we think about humanization and dehumanization, we find the assumption that those who gain representation, especially self-

7 "*Sichtbarkeit* ist einer der klassischen Topoi feministischer, antirassistischer, Schwarzer/migrantischer und lesBischwultranspolitischer Rhetoriken, und durchgängig ist er in den Rhetoriken dieser links-aktivistischen minorisierten Politiken positiv besetzt."

representation, have a better chance of being humanized, and those who have no chance to represent themselves run a greater risk of being treated as less than human, regarded as less than human, or indeed, not regarded at all. (*Precarious Life* 141)

Antke Engel also expresses high hopes for the beneficial effects of LGBTIQ representations that work to increase ambiguity: "Queer/feminist politics of representation – and within this framework strategies of ambiguation – aim to effect change in the fields of law, economics, the medical field and comparable social institutions and types of organizations"[8] (*Eindeutigkeit* 18).

Some LGBTIQ Scholars of Color agree with this assessment of the central importance of achieving (specific types of) LGBTIQ visibility. Cathy J. Cohen writes that organizing by Black lesbians and gay men in the 1970s and 1980s "helped create an environment in which the silence that had structured the lives of many black lesbians and gay men could now be escaped" (*Boundaries* 94). Kobena Mercer comes to a similar conclusion when he writes, "we have been involved in a process of 'making ourselves visible' and 'finding a voice.' Through activism and political organization, from large-scale international conferences to small-scale consciousness-raising groups, black lesbians and gay men have come out of the margins into the center of political visibility" (238).

While visibility politics have thus enjoyed widespread and often undisputed popularity among many LGBTIQ people, it is imperative to take a closer look at the racial politics involved in white gay men like Toland seeking increased visibility. Cohen's reminder that "for many black lesbians and gay men, attempts to silence them and make their presence invisible came not only from black communities but also from racist white lesbians and gay men" (*Boundaries* 94) asks us to question in how far white gay visibility actually contributes to the visibility of LGBTIQ People of Color. Interrogating the racial dimension of gay visibility politics in *Stuck Rubber Baby* is all the more urgent, as Toland's engagement in visibility politics narratively replaces his involvement with the Civil Rights Movement. This replacement is not framed as a betrayal of anti-racist activism in the comic but, quite to the contrary, as its logical transformation. Since the graphic novel equates racism and cis_hetero_sexism, it makes sense that fighting one would be seen as equivalent if not identical to fighting the other. So what are the actual racial politics of *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s gay visibility politics?

8 "Queer/feministische Repräsentationspolitiken – und im Rahmen dessen Strategien der VerUneindeutigung – zielen nicht zuletzt darauf, Veränderungen auch im Feld des Rechts, der Ökonomie, der Medizin und vergleichbaren gesellschaftlichen Institutionen und Organisationsformen zu forcieren."

Presuming for the moment that gaining a specific kind of visibility, which Schaffer termed "anerkennende Sichtbarkeit"[9] (*Ambivalenzen* 19), is indeed desirable, does the comic achieve this *anerkennende Sichtbarkeit* for both its white and Black LGBTIQ characters alike? At first glance, the answer to this question is yes. The book as a whole makes both white and Black LGBTIQ characters visible in such a way that they can be recognized as complex, relatable people. *Stuck Rubber Baby* even offers a rather nuanced depiction of regimes of LGBTIQ (in)visibility and acceptance in Black Southern communities. Les, the son of Rev. Pepper and Anna Dellyne is portrayed as a gay "**partyboy** from the **Rhombus** [who] could turn into a perfect **preacher's kid** at the flick of a **switch**" (106). When Toland first meets Les and wonders how he can be both of these two things at once, Mavis explains, "Sammy says Les just acts like who he **is.** The people he's **gay** around are content to keep the **secret**" (25). Les is comfortably and openly gay, just not around everybody. When Toland asks him if his family knows that he is gay, he responds, "**Mama** knows. It's cool. She's **always** had **'sissyboy' friends**. An' **papa** knows – which ain't to say he's ever said the first **word** about knowin'" (47). Among the people who "know," there are different levels of explicit and implicit recognition of him as a young gay man. This depiction of how Les and the people around him navigate the 'open secret' of his homosexuality is consistent with E. Patrick Johnson's description of how many of the Black gay men he interviewed live their homosexuality in the South:

In general, 'putting one's business in the street' is something frowned upon in many black communities, including the communities in which many of the narrators grew up and cur-

9 I have not been able to come up with a completely satisfactory translation for this term in English. A literal translation would yield "recognizing visibility," with a more idiomatic translation perhaps being "visibility that expresses recognition" (I thank Eva Boesenberg for this suggestion.) Schaffer explains why recognition is central to her concept of a desirable form of visibility: "On the one hand, recognition is the basis for the readability and understandability of specific subject positions – in the sense of perceptibility. In this sense it guarantees the reality and veracity of that which is recognized. On the other hand, relations of recognition are intertwined with the dimension of being invested with value" (20). ("Zum einen ist Anerkennung die Grundlage für die Lesbarkeit und Verstehbarkeit spezifischer Subjektpositionen – im Sinne von Erkennbarkeit. Hier garantiert sie die Wirklichkeit und die Wahrhaftigkeit dessen, was anerkannt wird. Zum anderen sind Verhältnisse der Anerkennung mit der Dimension der *Belehnung mit Wert* verbunden.")

rently live. As noted in the Introduction, most southerners avoid discussing topics such as sexuality in a direct manner. Thus, many of the men in *Sweet Tea* have not 'come out' – as it were – to their families, even though, by their own acknowledgement, their family members 'know.' The open secret of these men's homosexuality, in most instances, complicates our common notions of what it means to be 'out,' especially in light of the white gay community's insistence on a politics of visibility. (109)

In a way, *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s depiction of Les thus implicitly challenges the politics of visibility the graphic novel otherwise promotes by showing that more visibility is not necessarily always better because, "[i]n some ways, the 'don't ask, don't tell' mentality of southern families and communities provides a space for these men to have more freedom to engage one another, for they employ the terms and codes of the South to co-exist with neighbors and family and still express their sexuality" (E. Johnson 109). Yolanda Chávez Leyva has similarly written of the complexity of silence, which "[f]or lesbianas Latinas, [...] has been an enigma, a survival strategy, a wall which confines us, the space that protects us" (429). Asiel Adan Sanchez also writes of the gay Latino experience, "We come out in silence, between the refusal of mainstream queer narratives to acknowledge our culture, and the refusal of our culture to acknowledge our sexuality and gender." These quotes hint at the possibility that silence and (in)visibility might have very different meanings and functions in Communities of Color than they do in white communities: Whereas the silence of white LGBTIQ people is often primarily a strategy to preserve whatever privilege one may have access to, the silence of LGBTIQ People of Color can serve as protection and resistance against the racism outside communities of origin and it can facilitate LGBTIQ life while maintaining a multiplicity of complex ties that are necessary for survival. Sanchez submits that coming out may itself be a form of white privilege because it "requires a certain safety in visibility, in our families, in our jobs, in our cultures and in our homes. Many queer people of colour don't have access to those privileges."

He also raises the following question: "[W]hen so much of queer visibility is grounded in white history, white bodies and white gatekeepers, we have to question who benefits from coming out." He goes on to argue that gay white men benefit to a considerably larger degree than gay Latino men. Both he and E. Patrick Johnson propose that it might be primarily "the white gay community [who] insist[s] on a politics of visibility" (E. Johnson 109). While this is not to deny that there are LGBTIQ People of Color who believe in and practice a politics of visibility, it nevertheless suggests that visibility politics might actually be far less universally favored than the initial assessments I quoted above make it ap-

pear and that the whiteness implicit in these politics has also come under criticism from LGBTIQ People of Color.

Apart from the (white) privilege inherent in being able to be visible as LGBTIQ, this might have to do with the very different relationships that white people and People of Color (particularly Black people) have to visibility in general. As Lisa Walker reminds us, "the apparatus marked/unmarked designates how minority identities are constructed as marked while dominant identities are positioned as 'the unmarked generic' – white, male, heterosexual" (14). Within this apparatus, People of Color are marked and therefore hypervisible *as* People of Color, a process that Yancy describes as follows:

> The corporeal integrity of my Black body undergoes an onslaught as the white imaginary, which centuries of white hegemony have structured and shaped, ruminates over my dark flesh and vomits me out in a form not in accordance with how I see myself. From the context of my lived experience, I feel 'external,' as it were, to my body, delivered and sealed in white lies. The reality is that I find myself within a normative space, a historically structured and *structuring* space, through which I am 'seen' and judged guilty a priori. (*Black Bodies* 2)

This hypervisibility of Blackness contrasts with the more managed visibility of LGBTIQ people as LGBTIQ. While this difference is relative in that many LGBTIQ people cannot actively choose whether or not they are visible as LGBTIQ because their embodied gender (performance) always already marks them as somehow 'queer,' in the context of *Stuck Rubber Baby*, neither Les nor Toland are a priori visible (or marked) as gay. In a certain sense (and with certain restrictions) they can choose whether, where, and how they want to be visible as gay men. Les, however, has no such choice in his visibility as a Black man. This difference between the over-determination of Blackness and the (comparative) self-determination of homosexuality is one of the reasons why the way Toland inscribes himself into genealogies of Black suffering through his public coming out is so problematic. It erases the privilege of being able to make decisions about one's gay visibility, while simultaneously downplaying the violence done to Black people through the way "[w]hites 'see' the Black body through the medium of historically structured forms of 'knowledge' that regard it as an object of suspicion" (Yancy, *Black Bodies* 3).

Stuck Rubber Baby's careful portrayal of the layers of LGBTIQ (in)visibility in Southern Black communities could suggest that the comic as a whole offers a nuanced assessment of the efficacy of visibility politics for different constituencies. However, that is not the case. The graphic novel remains firmly committed

to the value of an (implicitly white) politics of gay visibility. It even betrays a certain bias that evaluates white gay visibility more favorably than it does Black gay visibility. In a side-story that runs parallel to Toland's coming out process and that gestures at the effect of Sammy's death on Les's visibility politics, *Stuck Rubber Baby* reveals that not all gay people have the same access to the visibility politics that the comic values so highly. The story begins with the intradiegetic narrator's account of how he and Les drove from the hospital to their first date: "Les **weirded** me **out** during our drive to **Alleysax** [...] He stayed **slumped** way down below the car's **window line** like he thought we were cruisin' in some rifle's **cross hairs** from the minute we left **Rattler Hill**" (135). In his unmarked, white body, Toland is naively unaware of the danger they might be in and questions whether Les's precautions are necessary. Les replies, "It's getting' **dark** … an' this here's a **lonely road** … an' we got us a **black** man an' a **white** man **together** in this car … an' I don't want no **shotgun** poppin' out of nowhere to persuade me I made the **wrong decision** about bein' **careful**" (135).

In his function as the narrator of the story, Toland is in the position to judge Les's choices concerning his (and their joint) visibility. From the narrator's point of view, Les's precautions are unnecessary, overly sensitive. Even the grown-up Toland still criticizes Les for "weirding him out" and dismisses the idea that they actually might be "cruisin' in some rifle's **cross hairs**" as a ludicrous fantasy with no base in reality. This sequence denies "the difference between those bodies that do not magnetize bullets and those bodies that do" (Wilderson 80) and conveys the impression that white people are better able to assess the danger that Black people might be in than Black people themselves. The white paternalism of this sequence notwithstanding, it could still be read within the general framework of *Stuck Rubber Baby* that values (all kinds of) visibility and seeks to overcome the need to hide one's sexuality (or oneself).

The same cannot be said for the second part of this story. When Les accompanies Toland on his first and only visit to Ginger and their baby daughter in Willowville, the narrator elaborates:

I couldn't help but **noticing** how **different** it was sharing a car ride with Les **that** day compared to the night we'd driven to **Alleysax** together. He wasn't slumping way down in his **seat** anymore. Which was **praiseworthy** and **strong** … So I'm **embarrassed** to admit how **nervous** it made me! [...] The **timing** of that and **other** changes in Les made me wonder if any of it was connected to Sammy's **murder**. It was as if Les had taken a personal **vow** of **recklessness** in Sammy's **honor**! [...] I often **think** about Les and wonder if that extra cockiness **served** him well in the years after I lost **touch** with him. I could never

forget that it was on the heels of our Willowville trip that the bodies of **Chaney, Goodman, and Schwerner** got dug out of a Mississippi **dam** … which led me to reflect on the **price** that can get exacted when you look bigotry too **squarely** in the **eye**. Of course, the **flip** side of that coin is the price that gets paid when you **don't**! (201)

Whereas the narrator first criticized Les for hiding, he now criticizes him for *not* hiding. Les's decisions about his own visibility are under constant white scrutiny and subject to explicit evaluations on the part of Toland. Toland's comments on Les's choice are somewhat contradictory. He starts out by confirming that Les's decision to be seen in the same car with a white man is "praiseworthy and strong" in principle. The narrator even criticizes this own immediate feeling of nervousness as embarrassing in hindsight and recognizes that hiding does not come without a cost, either.

However, at the same time, Les's refusal to hide is characterized as "recklessness" and an "extra cockiness" that could lead to him being killed. In contrast, Toland's own public coming out is never described in these negative terms, even though his own refusal to hide happens in the aftermath of one of his best friends actually being killed for the exact thing that Toland discloses. While Toland's decision to show himself as a gay man is portrayed as courageous, Les's decision to associate openly with white men is called "reckless" and "cocky." Not even Sammy's de facto reckless (and eventually deadly) decision to show his face and shout out his address to the makers of the *Dixie Patriot* is criticized in the same explicit terms in which Les is criticized for claiming his own visibility. While Toland implies that Les's "cockiness" would be to blame if he ended up dead at the hands of white people, he does not blame Sammy's recklessness for his death but rather blames *himself* for failing to prevent Sammy's reckless behavior (199). After Sammy's death, both Toland and Les decide to overcome their fear and become more visible in ways that could potentially open them up to harm. Only Toland's decision is unequivocally affirmed within the graphic novel, however. The different valuations of these two parallel stories show that white gay visibility does not necessarily entail Black gay visibility. The visibility that Toland claims for his own gayness does not extend equally to Les's visibility as a Black gay man in the company of a white gay man.

The fact, which is illustrated by the side-story I just discussed, that there is no such thing as 'LGBTIQ visibility,' but only ever the visibility of specific LGBTIQ subject positions that does not include all LGBTIQ subjects, points to the necessity of a more fundamental interrogation of the desirability of *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s gay visibility politics from an intersectional perspective. In a first step, one might ask what kind of gayness actually becomes visible when Toland

claims visibility for himself as a gay man. Apart from being white, middle-class, young, able-bodied, a U.S. citizen, Toland is also a normatively masculine cis man, whose homosexuality is portrayed as innate, immutable, and absolute. From the glimpses the reader gets of his adult life, it can be inferred that he moved from Clayfield to a larger city in the North, where he shares an apartment with his long-time partner, another white man. The gayness that is offered up for recognition through Toland's coming out and life narrative thus fulfills all the demands of gay respectability politics[10], which Heinz-Jürgen Voß and Zülfukar Çetin describe as follows:

> It remains a basic necessity that 'homosexuals' have to be clearly recognized as such – and that they have to profess 'their homosexuality' and a 'morally good' bourgeois lifestyle (among other things: coupled, employed, 'responsible for each other' [...]) in order to be 'recognized,' to gain access to benefits and be protected from discrimination. A sexual orientation that is not clearly oriented towards women or men, an ambiguous gender identity, unclear gendered-sexual life circumstances (with several partners), as well as poverty, unemployment, a history of migration, illegal and non-German (citizenship) status threaten one's opportunities of social participation.[11] (76)

If the visibility that *Stuck Rubber Baby* generates actually leads to more (political) recognition of gay white men like Toland, this recognition is still tied to conditions of respectability and thus excludes a vast number of LGBTIQ people

10 While homonormativity inevitably relies on some kind of respectability politics, the two terms are not co-extensive, with 'homonormativity' being the more specific of the two in that it also refers to a normative investment in neoliberalism (cf. Duggan 50). Since I see no evidence that *Stuck Rubber Baby* would subscribe to neoliberal ideals of privatization, consumption, and political acquiescence to the status quo, the concept of 'respectability politics' seems to be more fitting here.

11 "Grundlage bleibt dabei weiterhin, dass ‚Homosexuelle' klar als solche erkannt werden müssen – und dass sie sich zu ‚ihrer Homosexualität' und einem ‚moralisch guten' bürgerlichen Lebenswandel (u. a. als Paar, arbeitend, in ‚Verantwortung füreinander' [...]) bekennen müssen, um ‚anerkannt' zu sein, an Vergünstigungen teilhaben zu können und vor Diskriminierung geschützt zu sein. Ein nicht klar auf Frauen oder Männer zielende sexuelle Orientierung, eine nicht eindeutige geschlechtliche Identität, nicht so klar geordnete geschlechtlich-sexuelle Lebensverhältnisse (mit mehreren Partner_innen) sowie Armut, Arbeitslosigkeit, Migrationshintergrund, illegaler und nicht-deutscher (Staatsangehörigkeits-)Status bedrohen die Teilhabemöglichkeiten."

whose lives are less normative than Toland's. Or, as Stephen M. Engel puts it: "While such visibility suggests a high degree of mainstream cultural acceptance for gays, lesbians, and bisexuals, the inherent danger in this visibility is that it legitimates only particular elements of the movement. The gay image that mainstream culture has appropriated tends to be that of the middle-class white gay male" (59).

Even if this problem could somehow be circumvented and *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s visibility politics could somehow be extended to include all LGBTIQ people, the question would still remain who this visibility politics is actually addressed to. Who is asked to 'see' LGBTIQ people? Whose recognition is sought? And to what end? The fact that *Stuck Rubber Baby* was published by a mainstream publishing house and sold in regular bookstores suggests that unlike most other queer comics it was mostly addressed to 'the mainstream,' to straight cis people who are already recognized denizens of the normative space of the nation state. This is rather unsurprising, since visibility politics is almost by definition addressed at those in power, whose recognition is sought.[12] As Jason Ritchie phrases it, it is aimed at obtaining "the right of queer citizens to 'come out of the closet' and into the space of the nation" ("Come Out of the Closet" 560). From an intersectional perspective, this move is more than a little problematic. Schaffer articulates a general dilemma of all visibility politics:

> For minoritized subject positions and contexts of knowledge, more visibility means, furthermore, the affirmation of the very order of representation that minoritizes them. Precisely because visibility and the creation of visibility necessarily mean accessing ready-made, pre-formulated, and in the course of citation also self-rearticulating parameters and standards of representation, the praxis of creating visibility for minoritized positions always also produces the paradoxical situation of affirming the respective minoritization.[13] (*Ambivalenzen* 52)

12 In this respect, visibility politics differ from practices of subcultural self-representation that are addressed mainly at people who are 'like oneself' in certain respects and whose main function is to offer people representations in which they can recognize (parts of) themselves. I would say that both *Dykes To Watch Out For* and *Sexile/Sexilio* are more concerned with the latter than with visibility politics aimed at straight cis people.

13 "Für minorisierte Subjektpositionen und Wissenskontexte bedeutet mehr Sichtbarkeit zudem die Affirmation genau jener Repräsentationsordnung, die sie minorisiert. Denn genau weil Sichtbarkeit und Sichtbarmachung immer auch notwendig einen Rückgriff auf bereitstehende, vorformulierte und im Zuge des Zitierens sich reartikulierende

In order to become visible to someone, one has to first subscribe (at least to a certain degree) to their parameters of seeing. When addressing those in power, one rarely becomes visible as one would like to be seen, but one becomes visible as whoever the addressee is capable and wiling to see. I agree with Schaffer that LGBTIQ visibility politics generally run the risk of re-affirming the very cis_hetero_sexist logics that we aim to broaden and/or destabilize. I would add, however, that they also run the risk of re-affirming other oppressive logics, perhaps even more so than cis_hetero_sexist logics, because LGBTIQ visibility politics typically do not even set out to contest racist, colonialist, classist, ableist, etc. assumptions.

Within the U.S., the context at which LGBTIQ visibility politics are addressed is characterized by fundamental exclusions and the exploitation of People of Color and Indigenous People, which "require[s], through constant perpetuation via institutions, discourses, practices, desires, infrastructures, languages, technologies, sciences, economics, dreams, and cultural artifacts, the barring of nonwhite subjects from the category of the human as it is performed in the modern west" (Weheliye 3).[14] The question has to be asked whether the project of seeking *anerkennende Sichtbarkeit* for LGBTIQ people within this context might not participate in a politics of further excluding People of Color and Indigenous People from the category of the human by appealing to and thus endorsing the very power structures that are built on their oppression.

It is probably unsurprising that *Stuck Rubber Baby*'s affirmative self-inscription into the logic of 'gay is the new Black' discourses, with its attendant appropriation of struggles for racial justice, would eventually lead to a rather white version of LGBTIQ politics. The problem with its embrace of visibility politics is not only that it promotes visibility for normative, white gay men at the expense of Black gay men, who do not have the same access to visibility, but

Repräsentationsparameter und –standards bedeutet, produziert die Praxis der Sichtbarmachung minorisierter Positionen immer auch die paradoxe Situation der Affirmation der jeweiligen Minorisierung."

14 When Butler claims that people whose gender performance is unintelligible within a binary system of two mutually exclusive genders that are heteronormatively oriented towards each other "have not yet achieved access to the human" (*Undoing Gender* 30), she forgets that white LGBTIQ people do have access to the human via our whiteness in a way that (LGBTIQ) People of Color do not. Once again, a white articulation of LGBTIQ suffering flattens the differences between white people and People of Color and assumes a universal LGBTIQ experience independent of differential racialization.

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."