



THE EVIDENCE OF MEMORY AND COUNTERNARRATIVE

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Like many liberal arts faculty working in state universities in these budget-depleted times, my colleagues and I are being pressured to seek out “synergies” with our universities’ scientists and engineers, perhaps even to attach our research to theirs so that we might divert some of the grant monies they seem to attract. Stated less politely, scarce resources have created a cutthroat culture in which only the ruthless are assured survival. But, to those of us teaching and researching the politics of race and gender, the deans who prod us into these synergies with scientists neglect a crucial fact of American racial life: the fear and distrust of science expressed and deeply felt by many people of color. Yet, if our deans have been negligent, at least several scholars and activists have noticed the fear and distrust.

Sandra Harding claims that the essays she has collected for her anthology, “challenge the assumption that Western sciences have been entirely progressive forces in history” and identify and “locate the broader social projects of Western cultures that have appropriated the resources of the sciences,” to determine just how at times these sciences have become “attractive and susceptible to

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appropriation for racist and imperial agendas.”² Unsurprisingly, then, Harding collects essays on nineteenth-century European craniometry, twentieth-century intelligence testing, the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment,³ and other historical examples of a racial agenda in Western science. An editorial from *The Black Scholar*, for example, ends by defining science as “key to the material development of society” and by urging scientists to bring their work to the black community, but only after lamenting white sciences’ exclusions of that community—by regarding “us as an undifferentiated part of the environment, a given, rather than a subject active in changing the environment.”⁴

In my ethnic studies classes I have heard students of color express their own fear and distrust of science. Twice within a recent month I heard impassioned complaints about the science of climate change. Both a senior undergraduate student majoring in ethnic studies and a doctoral student in American Studies said that while they grant the climate may be changing, it is doing so in natural ebbs and flows, and they seriously doubt that the planet is warming at dangerous rates toward irreversible and unsustainable levels. Both suspect that wealthy and powerful commercial interests stand to profit from global warming, and that these profits drive the rhetoric of alarm. The undergraduate student even suspects that technologies for reversing global warming already stand ready to use, but governments and energy companies are waiting to milk the last profits from oil-based resources, waiting until panic creates a susceptible public willing to pay enormous prices for new, “suddenly” discovered, alternative resources. Though I know that other students of color hold similar beliefs, I would not venture to say that these two students are representative of their communities, or even to guess whether people of color are more or less likely than whites to discredit climate science. I will say, however, that while for many whites’ distrust of climate science may be driven by a virulently anti-intellectual conservatism, for people of color, distrust is driven by knowledge of past injustices; for example, the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment, committed in the name of science. The fear may be common, but the distrust has different sources.

Henry Louis Gates, Jr., makes a similar point, not about

² THE “RACIAL” ECONOMY OF SCIENCE: TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE, ix (Sandra Harding, ed., 1993).

³ See James Jones, *The Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment: ‘A Moral Astigmatism,’* in THE “RACIAL” ECONOMY OF SCIENCE: TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE (Sandra Harding, ed., 1993)..

⁴ The Black Scholar, *Science and Black People*, in THE “RACIAL” ECONOMY OF SCIENCE: TOWARD A DEMOCRATIC FUTURE 456 (Sandra Harding, ed. 1993).



science but about police and the legal system.⁵ He cites examples of corrupt racist cops and of the effort of the FBI's Cointelpro operation to destroy Martin Luther King, Jr., but then he cites the cases of Helen Chenoweth, an apologist for the Aryan Nations and shrill enemy of environmentalists, and of the black vendors in New York who sold *The Protocols of the Elders of Zion*, which had been published by a white supremacist press.⁶ "Paranoia knows no color," he writes.⁷ Dominant narratives give us reality as constructed by schools, the media, government, big business, and all other framers of the world—that is, by the winners who write history. "Counter-narratives are, in turn, the means by which groups contest that dominant reality and the network of assumptions that support it."⁸ And yet, though paranoia and conspiracy theories may be common to all racial communities, it is those communities that have been marginalized most systematically for the longest periods of history who are most likely to produce the most numerous and serious counter-narratives, both true and untrue; it is they who are most likely to be the paranoids who really do have enemies. Gates's essay was prompted by racialized reactions to the verdict in the O.J. Simpson murder trial; blacks mostly celebrated the "not guilty" verdict, whites mostly grumbled about a travesty of justice. But, his point is not to reveal his own view of Simpson's innocence or guilt but rather to explain that, after centuries of racial injustice, even blacks that believed Simpson was guilty thought the verdict was at least partial payback.⁹ That Cornel West believed Simpson was innocent and Rita Dove believed that he was guilty, matters less than the fact that for centuries black men have been subject to unredressed slavery, unpunished lynching, and, even today, the injustice of being seven times more likely to be imprisoned than white men.¹⁰ In fact, Dove found whites' outrage over the verdict more appalling than the verdict itself.¹¹ Not surprisingly, scholar-activist Angela Davis, herself an inmate once, describes contemporary

⁵ Gates's own recent encounter with police, in the summer of 2009, seems eerily to have been anticipated by his 1995 essay for *The New Yorker*, from which I draw in the following passage. But its outcome—his uneasy peace with the police department and his odd friendship with the arresting officer, all culminating in the "beer summit" hosted and managed by President Barack Obama—could never have been anticipated by his theory of counter-narratives.

⁶ Henry Louis Gates, Jr., *Thirteen Ways of Looking at a Black Man*, THE NEW YORKER, Oct. 23, 1995, at 56; reprinted in THE NARRATIVE READER, 289-91 (Martin McQuillan ed., 2000).

⁷ *Id.* at 290.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ See generally *id.*

¹⁰ See generally *id.*

¹¹ *Id.* at 289.

prisons as updated slavery and works for their abolition.¹² Additionally, scholar-activist Ruth Wilson Gilmore, even as she characterizes prisons as sites of racism, defines racism as a system that renders its victims vulnerable to premature death.¹³

Gates's concern, though, is not with the prison system but the counter-narratives that arise in defense against, or in defiance of racism.¹⁴ He recalls some of those counter-narratives. For example, Liz Claiborne went on Oprah Winfrey's show to explain that she does not design fashions for black women's bodies; the Ku Klux Klan owns Church's Fried Chicken; and the soft drink Tropical Fantasy is also owned by the Klan and infused with an ingredient that sterilizes black men.¹⁵ These counter-narratives are all false. Gates claims that "a good many black Americans" believe them,¹⁶ and perhaps, one sure proof of blacks' marginalization is that they take no legal action against these companies—for they express little faith, after all, in the legal system. Racism still happens, and counter-narratives still emerge for explaining and enduring it. Gates complains, "If you wonder why blacks seem particularly susceptible to rumors and conspiracy theories, you might look at a history in which the official story was a poor guide to anything that mattered much."¹⁷ Is the truth of the Tuskegee Syphilis Experiment really any more believable than the untruth of the Klan owning a fried-chicken chain?

It is not only the black community that creates counter-narratives. In my research on Japanese Americans' experience of World War II, I heard accounts of rumors that the government planned, in early 1942, to remove the community not to prison camps but to death camps; that, in 1943, the government welcomed young U.S. born Japanese-American men into the military so that they might serve as sacrifices on dangerous missions; and even that the government intended to sterilize the whole community of Japanese-Americans. This last rumor is recalled in Perry Miyake's satirical novel, in the form of a top-secret sterilization scheme that, according to counter-narrative, was defeated in its original 1940s manifestation by a single vote of Congress.¹⁸

Gates's essay originally appeared in *The New Yorker*, and it was later published in an anthology of essays and excerpts in

¹² ANGELA Y. DAVIS, ARE PRISONS OBSOLETE? 22 (2003).

¹³ RUTH WILSON GILMORE, GOLDEN GULAG: PRISONS, SURPLUS, CRISIS, AND OPPOSITION IN GLOBALIZING CALIFORNIA, 28 (2007).

¹⁴ See generally Gates, *supra* note 6.

¹⁵ Gates, *supra* note 6 at 289-90.

¹⁶ Gates, *supra* note 6 at 290.

¹⁷ *Id.* at 290.

¹⁸ PERRY MIYAKE, 21ST CENTURY MANZANAR, 177 (2007).



narrative theory and criticism.¹⁹ Literary critics such as Gates are usually concerned more with particular aspects of narrative,—language, rhetoric, modes of delivery, and relationships within and around the narrative community—than with truth or falsehood. This is changing, as perhaps the trendiest and fastest growing parts of programs in creative writing are those devoted to “creative nonfiction” or personal narrative. Postmodernism provoked writers to tease out distinctions between fiction and nonfiction, but it preferred fiction, whereas today more writers insist on the primacy of a nonfiction made “creative” by playing the tricks of fiction.²⁰ Oprah Winfrey’s righteous fulmination against distortions and lies in James Frey’s “memoir” missed the point that in today’s trendiest nonfiction, fact matters less than meaning, pattern, and value. Frey had to endure Oprah’s upbraiding on national television, but this probably boosted sales of his next book and attracted the attention of journalists and scholars.²¹ Much more serious was the condemnation heaped by conservative critics upon indigenous Guatemalan (Quiché) Rigoberta Menchú’s autobiography; a condemnation that claimed, in effect, that even the smallest factual errors might contribute to a grand revolutionary plot to undermine Western civilization.²² To suggest, in Rigoberta Menchú’s defense, that the fierceness of such condemnation betrays its own political agenda, an almost surely white and Eurocentric agenda, is to provoke a further demand for facts. Creators of dominant narratives, such as Oprah Winfrey, for all her blackness, have access to facts that creators of counter-narratives are denied.²³

My aim here is to refine Gates’s argument for counter-narrative, to propose a flexible distinction—one that opens and closes—between fact and value. An obvious condition, even a precondition, of racial oppression is a lack of access to education. To the oppressor, the indigenous as “savages” are uneducated and probably uneducable; slaves are denied a literacy they could never use. Yet underlying such denials is surely a fear that the oppressed may be educable after all and, if educated, may even overcome their oppression. The oppressor, seeking a further control in schools, then constructs a curriculum that conforms to the contours

¹⁹ Gates, *supra* note 6.

²⁰ See generally DAVID SHIELDS, *REALITY HUNGER* (2010).

²¹ *The Oprah Winfrey Show* (ABC television broadcast Jan. 26, 2006).

²² See BEN YAGODA, *MEMOIR: A HISTORY*, 259-60 (2009).

²³ See generally *A Million Little Lies*, *THE SMOKING GUN*, Jan. 4, 2006 <http://www.thesmokinggun.com/documents/celebrity/million-little-lies>; *A Million Little Pieces of Postmodernism*, *FLYOVER*, Aug. 20, 2007 http://www.artsjournal.com/flyover/2007/08/a_million_little_pieces_of_pos.html; *Rigoberta’s Story*, *THE ODYSSEY: LATIN AMERICA STAGE*, http://www.worldtrek.org/odyssey/latinamerica/rigoberta/rigoberta_story.html (last visited Apr. 16, 2011).

of Western history and culture, forcing the black or native child schooled in English to learn the white man's logic and rhetoric. When the white man owns the definition of evidence and proof, he is free to establish universal standards of truth. In the United States in recent years, debates over students' rights to their own language and over the validity of African American Englishes²⁴ have proven the issues of ownership, standards, and truth. When oppression is enforced for generations and centuries, then surely the truth as the racially oppressed experience it and know it looks very different from the truth as the white man defines it and enforces it.

Cautionary distinctions are in order. I am not arguing for a postmodernist leveling of narratives, the effect of which is to leach all stories of their meaning and value. It achieves this by de-historicizing those stories so that they stand alone, free-floating in a vacuum and lacking a context. In this construction all narratives can be only about themselves, and they have only themselves for an audience. Nor am I arguing for the opposite, in which all that matters—and everything does matter—is an urgent but pleasant immediacy in which greeting cards and kindergarten teachers can reassure audiences that all stories are good, and all are equally good. In both constructions, time and space, the carriers and main ingredients of context, are banished. But people and their actions produce change, and this change takes place in, and is made possible by time and space. The achievement of agency is a function of time and space. The vilest hardships may seem to place their victims in a timeless state, but implicit in the fact of being alive is at least a hope of justice, and that hope measures at least slender margins of time. Gilmore's definition of racism as a systematic predisposition toward premature death reminds us of the role of time in human relations; when even the living victim's slender margin of time represents a threat to the oppressor, then that victim must be haunted with a threat of early death, a severing of time. Even today, life expectancies in the U.S. are racialized.²⁵ We may measure freedom, then, as the extent of our inhabiting of time and space. We may measure social justice as the productive coexistence of our habitations. Racial oppression may be productive, but the profits all go to the oppressor, and those profits are measured in a time and space that convert to currency.

Counter-narratives not only contest dominant realities; they

²⁴ See generally GENEVA SMITHERMAN, *WORD FROM THE MOTHER: LANGUAGE AND AFRICAN AMERICANS* (2006).

²⁵ U.S. CENSUS BUREAU, *STATISTICAL ABSTRACT OF THE UNITED STATES: 2011* 76 (2011), available at <http://www.census.gov/compendia/statab/2011/tables/11s0103.pdf>.



also make meaning and value. They interpret history in a way that is true to the experience of marginalization. Sometimes they are factually true, and sometimes they are not. Sometimes they offer both facts and values to the racially oppressed, and sometimes they offer only values. But these values, even when unaccompanied by facts, still remain true to the experience of oppression. My students who distrust climate science know their peoples' history, and they are building upon it a new counter-narrative. Climate science may have all the facts, but it does not acknowledge and adapt to the values of communities of color. Global warming is its dominant narrative. It must earn the trust of the oppressed.

Through much of human history, dominant cultures transmitted their narratives orally. Obviously details, facts, changed in each new telling, but the cores of stories, their meaning and value, endured. Only when dominant cultures invented writing and amassed their stories in libraries, museums, and schools did they begin to doubt the value of oral histories. Multiculturalism has defended that value and opened a space for it, albeit a tenuous space, in art and the social sciences. Even so, oral histories often occupy marginalized spaces as "alternative" or "supplemental" histories, or as "hearsay." In my 400-level course in social justice, students turn in research papers that, even when inadequately or incorrectly documented, still try to honor and adhere to verified facts. But I encourage them to draw upon counter-narratives, even to construct their own. In a recent class, an engineering student applied his design skills to constructing upside-down versions of various standard-projection maps of the world, and then he defended the perspective of a topmost South and a bottom-facing North. A Latino student constructed a small mural with narratives of immigrant labor. And a Hmong student, a history major, interviewed his refugee parents to produce an oral history of their harrowing migrations across Southeast Asia.

One of the liveliest discussions in my social justice class concerned the difference between kinds of evidence: the quantitative, documented evidence of the archive and the memory and lore of oral testimonies. The archive not only writes our mainstream histories but also defines and enforces policy and law. Oral testimonies exist on the margins, in spaces reserved for historically oppressed groups. Not surprisingly, the history of slave-owners is much better known, even after the Civil War, than the history of slaves. Schools have long taught the history of owners. When multiculturalism expanded the curriculum to include the histories and cultures of marginalized peoples, however, the problem of historical evidence posed an obstacle. Would we, on one hand, teach the histories of dominant groups by the quantitative standards of the archive while, on the other hand,

teaching the histories of marginalized groups by the unstandardized vagaries of memory? Even oppositional historians such as Howard Zinn rely on the archive, if only to demonstrate the possibilities of alternative interpretations.²⁶ Most students believe that marginalized histories should be taught, but they cannot reconcile the difference between the archive and the counter-narrative. When I suggest that the opposition can be better understood as a difference between fact and value, many of them still see a clash, as if between something impenetrably solid and something pliantly soft.

Two presenters at the 2002 conference of the Rhetoric Society of America, both of them studying Japanese Americans' wartime internment, grapple with the issue and reach different conclusions. Maegan Parker, one of the presenters, tries to reconcile the difference by delivering the margin to the center.²⁷ History and memory are, she insists, complementary:

History seeks to offer a record of past occurrences, while collective memory constructs a selective interpretation of those occurrences. Embedded within the essence of collective memory is contemporary motivation: History is interpreted subjectively to urge a perspective, advocate a position, or argue a policy. However, collective memory cannot exist in an antithetical position to history, because it is intrinsically anchored by factual record.²⁸

What is valuable in this argument is Parker's sense of marginalized memory as collective and public, suffused with agency and determined to provoke action. What is problematic is her sense that history is static, passive—that, whereas memory acts, history merely exists. Implicit in this view is a belief that social justice is the sole responsibility of the oppressed. Consequently, in recounting the Senate debate over redress for Japanese Americans, Parker constructs the opposing sides, which she calls the “narrative of advocacy” and the “narrative of opposition,” as if they were

²⁶ See generally HOWARD ZINN, *A PEOPLE'S HISTORY OF THE UNITED STATES: 1492-PRESENT* (2010).

²⁷ See generally Maegan Parker, *Memory, Narrative, and Myth in the Construction of National Identity: A Rhetorical Analysis of the Senate Debate Over Reparations for Japanese Americans*, in *RHETORICAL DEMOCRACY: DISCURSIVE PRACTICES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT*, 277, 277-84 (Gerald A. Hauser & Amy Grim eds., 2004).

²⁸ *Id.* at 278.



politically and historically equal.²⁹ She concludes that the winning side, the case for redress, persuaded doubters by appealing to the aggrieved party's identity—not as Japanese Americans but as Americans.³⁰ By regarding collective memory as anchored to facts, she levels differences and assimilates counter-narrative to narrative.

Unlike Parker, Brian Lain, another presenter at the 2002 rhetoric conference, refuses to subjugate memory to history, preferring instead to show that even the most impenetrably solid-looking facts are mere props for dominant narratives.³¹ He recognizes too that memory of the camps has been swallowed up in an identity politics that has become its own end, a style that surrenders itself to assimilation rather than asserting a counter-narrative toward social justice.³² One condition of oppression is its crushing of organized resistance, even to the point of creating tensions between people within an oppressed community, and so communal memory necessarily serves to unite the community. But when a particular episode of oppression ends not even communal memory can prevent differing, even clashing interpretations of that episode. Predictably, then, those differences can be exploited in the interests of a later oppression. The contrary interpretation of the camps by conservative Senator S.I. Hayakawa—that Japanese Americans were well treated by the government, and that their later economic success vindicated the values of assimilation³³—was cited by opponents of redress. Brian Lain shows, however, that even atomized interpretations can serve counter-narrative.³⁴ He cites the photographs of Masumi Hayashi, who was born in the Gila River camp near the end of the war and who, in the 1990s, visited all the campsites to photograph them in their abandoned state.³⁵ Her images are panoramic, sweeping from a focal point sometimes even more than 360 degrees, and they are collages. She makes no effort to blur lines and edges between individual images. Describing an image from the abandoned Heart Mountain site, Lain writes that “a furnace tower ascends toward the sky with a single base, yet its top is split into two as slightly different

²⁹ *Id.*

³⁰ *Id.* at 281.

³¹ See generally BRIAN LAIN, *Panoramic Memories: Realism, Agency, and the Remembrance of Japanese American Internment*, in *Rhetorical DEMOCRACY: DISCURSIVE PRACTICES OF CIVIC ENGAGEMENT*, 229-235 (Gerald A. Hauser and Amy Grim, eds., 2004).

³² *Id.* at 231.

³³ ROGER DANIELS, *ASIAN AMERICA: CHINESE AND JAPANESE IN THE UNITED STATES SINCE 1850*, 333-334 (1988).

³⁴ *Id.* at 232.

³⁵ See generally THE MASUMI HAYASHI MUSEUM <http://www.masumimuseum.com/>.

perspectives of the tower record the light at different angles.”³⁶ Borrowing from Kenneth Burke, Lain argues that Hayashi’s images model a perspective made of incongruities.³⁷ “Within the frame of Hayashi’s collages,” he writes, “Japanese American becomes a position founded on the multiperspectival nature of memory. . . . Viewing Hayashi’s photo collages as generating a perspective by incongruity poses the possibility of new practices of remembrance not limited to recognition politics.”³⁸ Lain does not stress the fact that Hayashi, because she worked in photographic images, reproduced the camp sites as they looked at the time of her visits, in the 1990s, and not at the time of their operation. Abandoned and desolate, these sites—these places—speak the counter-narrative.

I have written elsewhere about CPT—Colored People’s Time—which is, in mixed racial company, a joke about late arrivals but is also, within communities of color, a time-sense of racial oppression and resistance.³⁹ It keeps time for what W.E.B. Du Bois called “double consciousness,”⁴⁰ and it provides a temporal setting for what Gary Saul Morson calls “sideshadowing.”⁴¹ Unlike foreshadowing, which involves “backward causation, which means that, in one way or another, the future must already be there,”⁴² sideshadowing conceives of open time, of possibility:

[S]ideshadowing admits, in addition to actualities and impossibilities, a *middle realm* of real possibilities that could have happened even if they did not. Things could have been different from the way they were, there were real alternatives to the present we know, and the future admits of various paths. By focusing on the middle realm of possibilities, by exploring its relation to actual events, and by attending to the fact that things could have been different, sideshadowing deepens our sense of the openness of time. It has profound implications for our understanding of history and of our own lives while affecting the ways in which we

³⁶ LAIN, *supra* note 31, at 232.

³⁷ LAIN, *supra* note 31, at 232.

³⁸ *Supra* note 31, at 234.

³⁹ See generally John Streamas, *Closure and “Colored People’s Time,”* in *TIME: LIMITS AND CONSTRAINTS*, 219-235 (Jo Alyson Parker, Paul A. Harris, and Christian Steineck eds., 2010).

⁴⁰ W.E.B. DU BOIS, *THE SOULS OF BLACK FOLK*, 3 (1973).

⁴¹ GARY SAUL MORSON, *NARRATIVE AND FREEDOM: THE SHADOWS OF TIME* 5-7 (1994).

⁴² *Id.* at 6.



judge our present situation. It also encourages skepticism about our ability to know the future and the wisdom of projecting straight lines from current trends or values.⁴³

Sideshadowing is not like the “alternative histories” imagined in historical novels in which, say, Germany wins the war or Kennedy is not assassinated. It may even converge with counter-narrative. In my entry-level ethnic studies classes, I tell students that, within days of the dropping of the atomic bombs on Japan, Langston Hughes and other black writers suggested that the bombs were a race weapon, meant only for dark-skinned targets, and would never have been aimed at Germans, the white enemy.⁴⁴ This may or may not be true. I mention it to students, first, for its historic insight into the black community’s response to the bombs, and then, more importantly, because of its serving as both counter-narrative and sideshadowing. Conservatives today would accuse Hughes and the black press of “playing the race card,” but people of color must at least know the canonical and dominant narratives before they can construct counter-narratives and sideshadowing. Too often, oppressors are ignorant of their own stories, the dominant histories they enforce. It is the oppressed who, like Masumi Hayashi and Du Bois, are most likely to know multiple perspectives.

I wish to return to science for a final illustration. In 1996, on the banks of the Columbia River in south-central Washington, students unearthed a few bones and skull fragments.⁴⁵ After testing, archaeologists declared that “Kennewick Man,” as the bones came to be called, vindicated their quietly circulating theory that early versions of Caucasians arrived in the Americas before the people we now call indigenous lived here. They suggested that Kennewick Man and his whole community of proto-whites were murdered by those land-bridge-crossers.⁴⁶ Evidence for this account remains scant, and so it may not yet be a dominant narrative, though writer Jack Hitt notes that it is gaining prominence.⁴⁷ Of course this narrative clashes with indigenous

⁴³ *Id.*

⁴⁴ Carole Doreski, “Kin in Some Way”: Reading Citizenship, Reading Relocation at the Chicago Defender, 25, unpublished manuscript (1999); REGINALD KEARNEY, AFRICAN AMERICAN VIEWS OF THE JAPANESE: SOLIDARITY OR SEDITION? 122 (1998).

⁴⁵ See generally James C. Chatters, *Kennewick Man*, NORTHERN CLANS, NORTHERN TRACES http://www.mnh.si.edu/arctic/html/kennewick_man.html.

⁴⁶ See generally Jack Hitt, *Mighty White of You*, HARPER’S July 2005, at 39-55; reprinted in THE BEST AMERICAN SCIENCE WRITING 2006, 237-271 (Atul Gawande ed., 2006).

⁴⁷ *Id.* at 267.

creation stories. Hitt finds no small coincidence in the fact that, according to this narrative, “the First American is of an ancient tribe whose members just happen to resemble the very scientists making the claim.”⁴⁸ Hitt indicates no preference for either indigenous myth or the archaeologists’ narrative, but he wonders at the politics behind establishing the dominant narrative:

Why assume the scientists’ narrative in this case is closer to the empirical truth? There have been times in the history of archaeology when one could find more objective, hard factual truth in the local oral narratives than in the scientists’ analysis, and this may well be one of those times. Oral legends, we increasingly learn, are often based on real events, and those myths can sometimes be decoded to reveal the nuggets of ancient journalistic truth that originally set them intoplay.⁴⁹

Hitt asks why schools refuse to teach oral histories and counter-narrative, then answers that we have divided narratives into the distinctly different modes of fiction and nonfiction, and we enforce the distinction.⁵⁰ As a result, we have lost the capacity to value myth. I would add that we have enforced distinctions between peoples, ascribing trust and truth to those who dominate and paranoia and irresponsibility to those who are dominated. Hitt maintains that ancient ancestors made no distinctions between fiction and nonfiction, and so found value, if not always fact, in their narratives. In sardonically gloomy prose, Hitt sees the future of the Kennewick Man narrative:

If the majority profoundly longs to believe that men of Caucasoid extraction toured here sixteen thousand years ago in Savile Row suits, ate gourmet cuisine, and explored the Pacific Northwest with their intact pre-Christianized families until the marauding hordes of war-whooping Mongoloid injuns came descending pell-mell from their tribal haunts to drive Cascade points into European hips until they fell, one after another, in the earliest and most pitiful campaign of ethnic cleansing, then that is what scientists will painstakingly confirm, that is what the high courts will evenhandedly affirm, and that is what in time the majority will happily come

⁴⁸ *Id.* at 268.

⁴⁹ *Id.* at 269.

⁵⁰ *Id.* at 270.



to believe.⁵¹

I prefer to believe that counter-narrative exists not only as a tool for coping with oppression, and not only as a means of resistance, but mostly to hold before us a vision of a future in which narratives will be neither dominant nor counter. Scholar-activists such as Angela Davis and Ruth Wilson Gilmore remind us that, for centuries, slavery was naturalized, that its abolition had to be envisioned before it could be achieved, and they believe that, today, an end to the racializing of prisons will have to be envisioned so that it might be achieved.⁵² That is, we need to denaturalize oppression. And the best way to denaturalize the unbearable is to fill our counter-narratives with the values of justice.

⁵¹ *Id.* at 271.

⁵² See DAVIS *supra* note 12, at 24-25; GILMORE *supra* note 13, at 243-44.