

# From White Perpetrator to Queer Victim: Queer White Fantasies of Racial Innocence

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The widely circulated claim by mainly white gay and lesbian organizations in the U.S. that “gay rights are the new civil rights” has long been critiqued by Morgan Bassichis and Dean Spade (among others) as “disappear[ing] the unspectacular and enduring conditions of black suffering that persist in the neoliberal era . . . [and] appropriating the apparently satisfied struggle of black people” (203) in order to bolster queer white privilege. In my talk, I will analyze Howard Cruse’s seminal graphic novel *Stuck Rubber Baby*, which was written during the early 1990s, when discourses positioning “gay as the new black” first emerged, to show how these discourses also serve to establish (queer) whiteness as innocent and conceal white (queer) participation in systems of racial domination. *Stuck Rubber Baby* narratively performs this exoneration of whiteness through the story of the central character, Toland Polk. In the beginning, Toland is introduced as a casually racist young white man, who came of age in postwar Alabama. Over the course of the graphic novel, he comes to terms with his homosexuality in the context of the civil rights movement. My talk will trace how Toland’s growing sense of his own queerness goes hand in hand with an eclipse of “the reality of white domination” (Leonardo 150). As the story progresses, the focus gradually shifts from racist violence against Black people to heterosexist violence against gay white men to the point where gay white men come to usurp the place of black men as innocent victims of white supremacy. Queer white complicity in regimes of racial domination thus completely disappears from view and is replaced by a fantasy of shared Black and queer victimhood and white innocence. *Stuck Rubber Baby* reveals how whiteness tries to redeem itself at the intersections of white domination and queer marginalization by focusing exclusively on the sites of marginalization and losing sight of the continued participation in white domination.

Bassichis, Morgan and Dean Spade. “Queer Politics and Anti-Blackness.” Eds. Jin Haritaworn, Adi Kuntsman, and Silvia Posocco. *Queer Necropolitics*. New York: Routledge, 2014. 191-210. Print.

Leonardo, Zeus. "The Color of Supremacy: Beyond the Discourse of 'White Privilege.'" *Educational Philosophy and Theory* 36.2 (2004): 137-152. Print.