Intertwining Histories in Donald Rodney's *Untitled (Cowboy and Indian After David Hockney's We Two Boys Together Clinging, 1961)*, 1989

In a drawing from 1989, Donald Rodney appropriated and adapted David Hockney's painting *We Two Boys Together Clinging* from 1961. It is both an enigmatic response to the racial politics of 1980s Britain and an unexpected and provocative intertwining of histories of race, colonialism, and sexuality.

Gregory Salter

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In Donald Rodney's 1989 drawing *Untitled (Cowboy and Indian After David Hockney's We Two Boys Together Clinging, 1961)*, a cowboy places one arm on a Native American with an ambiguous touch (fig.1). He stands slightly taller than the other figure and looks down, his lips pursed, perhaps in speech or perhaps, even, to offer a kiss. The Native American's body faces the cowboy, though his head is turned; he seems to look back out to us while offering an ear, or a cheek, to the other figure. The two figures are simply drawn. Their bodies are curved oblongs supported by thin, footless legs, and their identities are indicated by stereotypical headgear – a Stetson hat for the cowboy and feathered headdress for the Native American. Rodney has formed the bulk of these figures out of an absence or subtraction of pencil marks. The Native American's body is largely unmarked paper, though areas of dark shading emphasise the touch of the cowboy's hand. The cowboy's hat, body, and sections of the Native American's headdress are modelled out of erased areas of pencil. Behind the cowboy, there is a dark rectangle of thick, scrawled pencil marks, towards which he almost appears to pull or guide the Native American. Their two heads, meanwhile, are formed from subtler, softer shading into uncanny masks. Between their heads, and partly obscuring the Native American's face, is another area of frantically erased pencil – a kind of anxious absence that separates the two men.

This essay seeks to address the histories and resonances of this enigmatic drawing. It begins with Rodney's focus on the figures of a cowboy and a Native American, which reflects his general interest in this theme – it appeared in several of his paintings in the early 1980s, though this later work returns rather unexpectedly to the subject in ambiguous ways. It then addresses the drawing's curious appropriation of the queer British Pop artist David Hockney's painting *We Two Boys Together Clinging* from 1961. Rodney has mutated Hockney's representation of homosexual love into a personal drama between the cowboy and the Native American, that bears queer traces. Finally, it explores how the drawing is also a continuation of Rodney's preoccupation with masculinity, placing it in comparison

with another representation of black masculinity in Wolverhampton Art Gallery's collection, Keith Piper's *Go West Young Man*, 1996.

Cowboys and Indians

The figures of the cowboy and Native American first appeared in Donald Rodney's work in 1982. In the painting, *Sadly The Redskin Has His Reservations* from September of that year, a Native American and a cowboy meet in a desert landscape. The Native American is depicted with paint on his brown body and face. A band stretches across his forehead, though it is painted with the same blue of the sky, giving the strange effect of separating the top of his head from the rest of his body. He holds out an open hand with six digits to the cowboy on the other side. The cowboy, painted with bright pink skin, is depicted in a checked shirt, neck scarf, and black Stetson, and he holds his own hand out to shake that of the Native American. His eyes are wide and his face is dominated by a curving, sharp grin created out of thick lines of black paint. Running along the side of his face and hat, Rodney has twice written the phrase 'The white man smiles'. Across from him, the Native American smiles too, though his horizontal band of teeth read more like an anxious, forced grimace. Alongside the Native American's body are the words of the title: 'Sadly the Redskin has his reservations'.

This is an image of power, wielded with a degree of superficial co-operation but also duress. The cowboy's manic, unsettling grin and the Native American's resigned offering of his hand betray this. The 'reservations' of the title, of course, do not just refer to feelings of doubt and reluctance. 'Reservation' was the term given to small parcels of land that were granted to Native American tribes by the US government following the American Revolutionary War of 1775-83. This process was undertaken initially through peace treaties that were frequently signed under duress by Native Americans. The term continued to be used for land occupied by Native American tribes, even after the US government began forcibly relocating them to land to which they had no historical connection.[1] Rodney's painting and its title appear to dramatise this process of negotiation and forced migration.

The tentative, yet unsettling, agreement that is being reached in *Sadly The Redskin Has His Reservations* reaches a violent climax in another of Rodney's paintings of September 1982, *How The West Was Won* (fig.2). We are back in the simple desert space of the former painting – a bright sky, beaming sun, and luminous yellow sand. A white cowboy – depicted with pink skin, blonde hair, and a familiar hat, though now wearing all black – grins almost demonically, with his smile reaching up and across one side of his face and curving off the other side. His arm is raised; originally this held a red plastic toy gun, which Rodney had glued to the surface of the canvas, though this has since been lost. It was aimed at the head of the Native American on the right of the painting. He is depicted frontally, with feathers

emerging from a band around his head and his mouth turned down into a frown. Travelling along the contours of the cowboy's body and hat are the words 'The only good Injun is a dead Injun'. While *How The West Was Won* and *Sadly The Redskin Has His Reservations* were produced at the same time, it is unclear as to whether they are meant to be read 'in sequence' – as a moment of (forced) negotiation giving way to violence and murder. However, the paintings simply and powerfully evoke the power and histories of the 'cowboy and Indian' theme.

Part of this power comes from the paintings' distinct combination of a childlike style, popular culture and mass media, and direct politics. These are intentionally childlike works, intended in part, we can assume, to evoke the artwork produced by children at school. This is borne out in the simplistic, flat rendering of the landscape, the simplified faces, expressions, and bodies of the figures, and the inclusion of explanatory text, down to Rodney also including his full name and the specific date of production (all that is missing, perhaps, is his age). The choice of subject matter also evokes childhood, as the cowboy and Native American are subjects we might expect children to focus on in their artworks. This subject has filtered into the worlds of children since the beginning of the twentieth century through the Western film genre. Rodney's work alludes to this: he paints a black border with white marks around each work, giving them the appearance of individual frames from a reel of film (again, this suggests that we might want to read the works as part of a filmic narrative). *How The West Was Won* was also the title of a highly successful, Western epic of 1962, which starred John Wayne, Gregory Peck, and Debbie Reynolds, amongst others. Additionally, the inclusion, at one time, of the red toy gun in *How The West Was Won* also underlines the link between the subject and childhood, evoking pretend games of 'cowboys and Indians' between children. We might also draw some links between Rodney's work and Roy Lichtenstein's paintings that focused on scenes of war and violence from comic books – such as his large yet detached and cool *Whaam!*, 1963 – though Rodney's painting makes more explicit use of dark, biting humour and has a more complex interplay of references and emotions. In these paintings, Rodney allows the resonances of his subject matter – its links to childhood, film, play, and pop culture – to rub uncomfortably alongside the connotations of power, coercion, and eventual violence that are inscribed within them.

I have looked back to Rodney's 1982 paintings as it is important to acknowledge their significance at the early point in his career; it is striking and surprising to find the same subject re-emerge, suddenly, in his art seven years later. I want to suggest here that while the 'cowboy and Indian' subject was something to interrogate for its own historical and early 1980s resonances, it became increasingly useful as a broad metaphor or dynamic that had resonances beyond simply itself. For example, the meeting of two opposing figures also occurs in Rodney's *Master and Servant*, 1986, a work created in ink, bleach, and wax crayon on hospital sheets. In this work, a white worker in overalls on the left shakes hands with a man in a suit on the right, who looks like a business owner; underneath, the text 'MASTER &

SERVANT' seems to imply a disruption of class power, with 'MASTER' aligned with the worker and 'SERVANT' aligned with the man in the suit. However, between the two figures are some words that are attributable only to the suited man:

> DEAR CHEQUE BOOK. I HAVE HIM NOW, MY UNWITING [SIC] PAWN AGAINST THE ENGLISH WORKING CLASS. YOU SEE OUR CONGLOMERATE PLANS HAVE WORKED. THE POWER OF COLLATERAL MIXED UP WITH THERE [SIC] OWN IRRATIONAL XENOPHOBIA WILL SEE THE FOOLS VENTING THERE [SIC] ANGER ON THE JEWS, SPICKS, WOPS, COONS, AND PAKIES. & ME THE UNACCEPTABLE FACE SHALL PULL THE STRINGS. SHAKE THE HAND. I'M THE MASTER.[2]

Rodney's text underlines that it is the suited man who is in control. His words imply that he makes a scapegoat of migrants and people of colour so that white workers might vent their anger at them, rather than figures of capitalist power such as himself. The handshake, then, between the white worker and the suited boss has echoes of the tentative negotiation in *Sadly The Redskin Has His Reservations*. Both relationships are built around coercion and compromise that merely reproduce existing systems of power, of race or class.

Beyond *Master and Servant*, Rodney's work of the mid-to-late 1980s consistently engaged with incidences where coercion and control of people of colour sprung, suddenly, into violence. His *Soweto/Guernica*, 1988, adapted Picasso's famous 1937 representation of the Spanish Civil War to speak of the 1976 Soweto Uprising, where black South African school children demonstrated against the introduction of lessons taught in Afrikaans and were met with violent force from police. Hundreds of the student protestors were killed. For his work, Rodney placed the figure of Mbuyisa Makhubo carrying her son Hector Pieterson after he was shot by police at the centre of the violent chaos that Picasso depicted in Guernica. At the same time, the effects of contemporary police brutality in Britain also became a prominent aspect of Rodney's practice. For instance, Wolverhampton Art Gallery holds the preparatory drawings for the frieze of *Soweto/Guernica*, which contains representations of acts of police brutality in combination with rampaging half-horse, half-human figures (in a nod, perhaps, to the Parthenon Marbles at the British Museum) (fig.3). With these other works in mind, the ambiguous embrace of the Native American by the cowboy in Rodney's *Untitled* drawing begins to take on broader possibilities. The cowboy's touch might be an echo of the grinning cowboy's offered hand in *Sadly The Redskin Has His Reservations* or the duplicitous handshake offered by the suited man in *Master and Servant*. The Native American is welcomed into an embrace that contains, controls, and perhaps dooms him, a fate that Rodney may well have seen playing out within class and racial struggles in both Britain and the wider world during the 1980s. The figures of the cowboy and the Native American in his drawing, then, are rooted in the ongoing cultural resonance of Westerns and the histories and power relations they evoked. But they are also, perhaps, increasingly mobile symbols of the dynamics of race and class in society more widely.

Black/queer/pop

I have so far paid little attention to the connections between Rodney's *Untitled* drawing and the artwork that provided some inspiration for it: David Hockney's *We Two Boys Together Clinging*, 1961. However, his appropriation of Hockney introduces questions about Rodney's connections to Pop Art and British art history more widely. It brings connotations of sex and desire into an image of racial power. I would like to argue that the traces of queerness that inevitably remain here might shape our understanding of this drawing in new or unexpected ways.

Rodney's quotation of Hockney's work puts him in dialogue with Pop Art and, more generally, British art of the recent past. This is a consistent though so far under-acknowledged aspect of his art. In his sketchbooks during 1988 and 1989 – around the point at which he produced his *Untitled* drawing – there is evidence that Rodney was also reflecting on the work of another British Pop artist, Richard Hamilton. He consistently riffs on the title of Hamilton's famous collage *Just What Is It Makes Today's Homes So Different So Appealing?*, produced for the *This Is Tomorrow* exhibition at the Whitechapel Gallery in London in 1956. Rodney's version of the title becomes 'Just What Is It That Makes Today's Black Homes So Fragile So Vulnerable So Open To Attack' and appears to have formed the basis of ideas for an installation.[3] One of the adaptations of Hamilton's title is followed by a sketch of a policeman entering the home of Dorothy 'Cherry' Groce. She has been knocked to the floor and the policeman, in riot gear, stands over her.[4] On 28 September 1985, Groce was shot by a policeman and paralysed below the waist as they sought her son during an early morning raid; the incident sparked the Brixton riots later that day. A week later, Cynthia Jarrett died from heart failure after the police entered her home to search it on 5 October 1985; this triggered the Broadwater Farm riot the following day. It is possible, then, that Rodney's adjustments to Hamilton's title were conceived with these events in mind. These events had certainly filtered into other works by Rodney, such as the poster for his 1986 show *The Atrocity Exhibition and Other Empire Stories* at The Black-Art Gallery in North London, which depicted both Jarrett and Groce. Two years later, Hamilton's title and its connections to a collaged image that combined aspirational objects and figures of an emerging post-war home and British society more widely became a pointed comment on the fragility of black lives and homes in 1980s Britain. Rodney transforms the post-war consumer boom and the white figures of Hamilton's ideal domestic interior into police racism and a visceral sense of vulnerability in your own home.

Beyond Hamilton, Rodney also engaged with other canonical figures of post-war British art. His use of collaged x-rays arranged in strict, framed grids, such as in *Blood In My Eye*, 1986, appears to be a nod to Gilbert & George's pictures. In *Apart Hate*, 1987, meanwhile, a

pacing dog appears to have been lifted from Francis Bacon's *Dog*, 1952 in the Tate (additionally, the x-rayed rib cages recall the hanging slabs of meat from Bacon's *Painting*, 1946). These borrowings from figures including Hamilton, Gilbert & George, and Bacon – as well as Picasso in *Soweto/Guernica* – were conscious, political acts. Eddie Chambers puts it like this:

> Rodney sought not so much to make work that stood outside of this history; instead, he made work that critiqued that history (in terms of its partiality and bias), whilst simultaneously demanding for himself a credible place within a more equitable and textured history of art.[5]

In this way, Rodney sought to work critically and actively, both with and against representations that surrounded him, whether that was 'cowboy and Indian' imagery or the work of other artists. It was a way of folding himself, as a black artist, into this history but also – crucially – troubling it at the same time.

Rodney brings this active, critical approach to appropriation in his references to the David Hockney painting in his *Untitled* drawing. In *We Two Boys Together Clinging*, Hockney created an unapologetic image of homosexual desire (particularly notable given that he was working six years prior to the partial decriminalisation of homosexuality in England and Wales in 1967) (fig.4). The title comes from a poem by the American writer Walt Whitman, who was known for addressing homosexual desire in his poetry of the late nineteenth century. The two figures are locked in an embrace: they lean in to kiss each other (a heart marks the meeting of their lips), the left figure's hand reaches out to touch his partner (just as in Rodney's version), and the closeness of their bodies is emphasised by short brush marks that seem to pull and fasten them together. Rodney's adaptation of Hockney's painting bears its traces of desire. I have previously suggested that we might read the *Untitled* drawing as an image that allows the imbalance of power at the heart of the cowboy and Native American relationship to speak to wider questions of racial and class struggles. It is, still, an image of coercion. At the same time, the drawing's intimacy, the closeness of these figures, is difficult to deny. It is true that Rodney has transformed two queer lovers into two historical foes, but there is an aura of desire – in the cowboy's gentle hand, the way the figures' faces are caught in movement towards each other – that intermingles with more readily available meanings. Why has Rodney allowed coercion and intimacy, tension and desire, to become part of the relationship between his cowboy and Native American?

It is worth noting that Rodney explored the intersections between race and sex – and particularly the sexualisation of black bodies and black histories – elsewhere in his work. For his contribution to the exhibition *Black Markets: Images of Black People in Advertising & Packaging in Britain (1880-1990)* held in Manchester in 1990, Rodney produced artworks based on the front covers of pulp novels written by white authors that combined sex and

slavery. For example, one untitled work is a colour photocopy of a collage of various photographs of the cover of Kyle Onstott's 1957 novel *Mandingo*. The latter had been a wildly successful novel upon its publication, becoming a national and international bestseller and, in 1975, a successful film, directed by Dino De Laurentiis and starring Ken Norton, then at the height of his boxing career. The novel and film take place on a fictional plantation called Falconhurst, which is a slave-breeding plantation (where slaves were encouraged to produce children). *Mandingo* is dominated by the sexual exploitation of slaves by both white men and women, and inter-racial sex forms its anxious heart. The book cover depicts Blanche (played by Susan George in the film), the wife of slave-owner Hammond, gazing up at one of the male slaves Ganymede (played by Norton). In this scene, Blanche blackmails Ganymede into having sex with her. She falls pregnant and gives birth to a mixed-race child, who is immediately killed to avoid scandal. Hammond retaliates by poisoning Blanche and shooting and drowning Ganymede at the climax of the film.

Rodney considered novels and films like *Mandingo* as means for a white audience to re-stage the past:

> They are a type of fact/fiction utilising genuine historical fact combined with eroticised romanticism of that time. The books revolve around plantation life but usually have key characteristics that link them all, black stereotypes of sexual omnipotence; graphic depictions of a sado-masochistic nature and the fear/thrill of miscegenation.

His response was repeatedly to photograph the cover of *Mandingo*, both in and out of focus, as a means of 'distorting and dulling the images'; he saw this as a way of seeking 'the truth below the surface', of resisting the rewriting of black history.[6] Through his use of individual, collaged photographs of sections of the Mandingo cover, its image becomes distorted and fragmented, but also the object of intense study. Rodney emphasises the focus on the black body's physicality and sexuality (his photos are arranged to broaden Ganymede's shoulders and lengthen his arm), while honing in on Blanche's look of both lust and power. Rodney seeks to underline the complex and troubling intermingling of black history and sexuality here.

There are certainly elements of Rodney's concern with interracial desire in the *Untitled* drawing, though his focus has shifted from pulp re-imaginings of slavery to locating the possibility of interracial, same-sex desire in the figures of the cowboy and Native American. While the *Untitled* drawing lacks the obvious references to white fantasies that inhabit the *Mandingo* collage, it is appropriate, I think, to hold on to Rodney's sense that sexuality and desire's meeting with histories of race, might distort or complicate those histories. In the *Mandingo* collage, that distortion was fundamentally harmful; in the *Untitled* drawing, it is Rodney himself who creates this distortion through his use of the Hockney painting and so

we might want to consider this as more tentative and even playful. At the same time, the undercurrents of desire between the cowboy and Native American feel neither idealistic (too much remains of coercion, of the power relations between these figures), nor mocking. Instead, we might suggest that the traces of desire that Rodney allows to infiltrate this image allow these figures to inhabit a closeness and separateness at the same time. The Native American, coerced and destroyed elsewhere in Rodney's work, is, instead, coerced and desired here in the drawing. A Western cliché of good (cowboys) versus evil (Native Americans) becomes a much messier, open-ended narrative of closeness (think of the 'clinging' of Hockney's title, the cowboy's touch) and desire.

Rodney was not homosexual, but his artworks and sketchbooks demonstrate an engagement with the work of queer artists, including Hockney but also others, and some overlaps in terms of subject matter and approach. His sketchbooks include small, quick studies of works such as Francis Bacon's *Two Figures*, 1953 (which depicts two men having sex on a bed) and Andy Warhol's *Dick Tracy*, 1960 (Tracy was a personal sex symbol to Warhol; as he put it, as a matter of fact, 'I fantasised about Dick's dick').[7] Again, I am not suggesting that Rodney had a particular interest in the homoerotic connotations of these images, but, at the same time, they held enough interest for him to record them in his sketchbook. Additionally, Rodney makes several copies of David Wojnarowicz's burning house image in his sketchbooks, which he used as a stencil for street art before it appeared in later paintings.[8] Wojnarowicz was inspired to create it after coming across a set of stencils of 'international symbols' for signs like 'train crossing', 'no smoking', and so on; his response was to 'invent some symbols that are international but haven't been invented', like the burning house.[9] Wojnarowicz's burning house could be linked to his rejection, as a queer man and a victim of childhood abuse, of the nuclear family, and it might more broadly be tied to a desire to undermine given structures of society, such as the home. Houses recur in Rodney's art and sketchbooks – they are, at various moments, aflame, broken, forcibly entered, unhomely, but also necessary. While the burning home may have been a symbol of queer alienation for Wojnarowicz, it may well have worked as a jumping-off point, for Rodney, for thinking through the fragility of black homes, racial and social unrest, and a feeling of homelessness. Elsewhere, Rodney took a more critical approach to queer imagery, juxtaposing a detail of the anonymous black male's penis from Robert Mapplethorpe's controversial *Man In A Polyester Suit*, 1980, with a tiny toy figure of The A Team's Mr. T cast in bronze as a means of exploring stereotypes about black masculinity in a 1991 work titled *Bête Noire*.

Rodney's art has also drawn parallels with contemporary queer experiences in the 1980s and 1990s. He had sickle cell anaemia, a disease that only affects black people, and this became an aspect of his artworks, particularly as his health worsened during the 1990s (though Eddie Chambers has rightly highlighted that this has generally overshadowed the other elements of Rodney's practice).[10] Some critics drew links between Rodney's illness

and the AIDS crisis, such as Amanda Sebestyen, who commented, 'Donald Rodney also suffers from sickle cell anaemia, which, like AIDS, is little understood because it only affects people who are themselves seen as disease within our body politic'.[11] Sickle cell and AIDS appear to have merged in public consciousness as diseases of the blood. Rodney's installation *Visceral Canker*, 1990, for example, was to include tubes that circulated blood around the coats of arms of Queen Elizabeth I and John Hawkins, the first English slave trader. He was refused permission to use his own blood, as it was considered a hazard to the public. Chambers refuses a simplistic alignment of Rodney's sickle cell anaemia with AIDS, which is understandable. However, he does this by contrasting Rodney's nuanced approach to his own illness, which he used as a metaphor for the diseases of racism, apartheid, and police brutality, with what he calls the 'declared and overstated victimology' of artists with AIDS.[12] This not only flattens and dismisses artistic responses to AIDS, but it also denies what are potentially productive, though admittedly complex, connections between black and queer experience in the 1980s and beyond.

These wider examples from Rodney's practice reveal instances of quiet engagement with the work of queer artists, critical appropriation of their themes, and broad overlaps in their subject matter. Rodney's appropriation of Hockney, arguably continues in this vein. The *Untitled* drawing is a shifting combination of colonial and racial power, popular culture, interracial desire, and queer intimacy. It allows power, coercion, and closeness to sit, together, on its surface. Rodney spoke of his desire to make work that found a place for himself and other black people in history, but he also spoke of his awareness of the way that history had been and could be distorted. His response in the *Untitled* drawing is not to create his own wilful distortion, but to create an appropriated image that forms unexpected connections between black, colonial, and queer histories – that links them, through this image, and, in the process, rethinks and recalibrates them. The effect is to at once restate the damaging history and endurance of the figures of the cowboy and Native American, to unsettle that history and its power by inserting elements of interracial, homoerotic desire, and to create unexpected links between the black community and the queer community at a moment of mutual suffering in the 1980s, in Britain and around the world.

Masculinity

Rodney's *Untitled* drawing extends and complicates his approaches to a subject he returned to frequently: black masculinity. His 1990 work *Self-Portrait: Black Men Public Enemy* was made up of a series of five portraits: two were police mugshots, two were images of a man, handcuffed with his head bowed, and one was an 'identikit' composite image of a black man, used frequently at this point by the media when the police were seeking suspected criminals. Each of the men's eyes, aside from those of the identikit figure, have been obscured by black rectangles, taking away their individuality. In this work, Rodney produced a self-portrait built out of stereotypical images of black men where they are framed 'as the

enemy within the body politic', highlighting the way in which black male selfhood is inevitably affected by such negative representations.[13] Similarly, *Doublethink*, 1992, brought together a series of sporting trophies that were engraved with stereotypes about black people; the male football players and athletes caught in motion on top of many of the trophies, spoke to stereotypes of sporting prowess that both offered possibilities to young black men while also limiting and trapping them. The *Untitled* drawing, however, is a less direct engagement with the question of masculinity. To unpack its relationship to masculinity, I want to place it in conversation with another work of art from Wolverhampton Art Gallery's collection by Keith Piper. Rodney and Piper were both founder members in 1982 of the BLK Art Group, alongside Marlene Smith and Eddie Chambers, and they exhibited and worked together throughout the 1980s.

Like Rodney, Keith Piper's short film, *Go West Young Man*, from 1996, brings together black history with the history of American expansionism and places the question of black masculinity at the heart of their intertwining (fig.5). It is just one iteration of the merging of these themes that first appeared in Piper's student work in the late 1970s, when he combined the engraved plan of the English slave ship The Brookes, first published in 1788, with Horace Greeley's call – 'Go West young man' – for white male settlement of the American West. Piper has described how he was 'struck by the ironic tension generated between this optimistic invocation to embrace the 'west' and all that it offered, and the harsh realities of the forced transportation of African peoples into the western hemisphere via the terrors of the 'middle passage'.[14] He returned to this theme – and the specific juxtaposition of the slave ship and Greeley's words – throughout the 1980s and 1990s. This included the computer-animated film, produced on a Commodore Amiga, in the Wolverhampton collection. The film combines music, sounds and images of the ocean, historical material, photography, fragments of documentary, news, and commercial film. Over the top of this is a conversation between a son (Wilbert Johnson) and a father (Hayden Forde). Their words place the young black male at the centre of a history of black suffering and violence, from the middle passage, to colonialism, migration, and contemporary racial prejudice. For our purposes, it is important that Piper forms a link between American expansionism and the history of slavery; the call of 'go west young man' becomes both a rallying cry of possibility for some and a condemnation to forced enslavement for others.

Piper's *Go West Young Man* frames black masculinity as the focus of a long history of injustices. Early on, the father comments:

> All of us have done some hard times down here, I mean irrespective of age, irrespective of sex, man, woman, youth or elder, we've all been catching hell for centuries. But you: young, black and male, looks like they've reserved your prime spot, filed right up there amongst their worst nightmares.

Rodney, as we have seen in *Self Portrait: Black Men Public Enemy* and *Doublethink*, was conscious of a similar idea and actively exploring it in his artworks. The *Untitled* drawing is rooted in questions of masculinity too, though Rodney's response to the 'Go West' call here is to move into a space of ambiguity, where masculinity is both coerced and caressed and its certainties begin to disintegrate. In this space, the oppressive histories of racism and slavery, and the ever-present ideals of masculinity that reproduce these histories, are present in the figures of the cowboy and Native American. But they are undermined and troubled by the presence of desire and traces of queerness. If Piper illuminated histories of black masculinity to explain its present dilemma in 1980s Britain, then Rodney momentarily appears to have sought to undermine the histories and representations that sought to fix black masculinity and, more widely, institutions of racism, classism, and even heterosexuality in place. The clinging cowboy and Native American of Rodney's *Untitled* drawing are an intentionally ambiguous, imaginative response to the tropes and histories that appeared to divide and limit society in 1980s Britain.

Gregory Salter is a Lecturer in Art History at the University of Birmingham.

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Images

Fig.1 Donald Rodney, *Untitled (Cowboy and Indian After David Hockney's We Two Boys Together Clinging, 1961)* (1989) drawing, 137 x 120 cm ©Wolverhampton Art Gallery ©The Estate of Donald Rodney.

Fig.2 Donald Rodney, *How The West Was Won* (1982) acrylic paint on canvas, 120 x 121.5 cm ©Tate ©The Estate of Donald Rodney. Reproduced with permission of Tate, under Creative Commons Licence CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 (Unported) https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/rodney-how-the-west-was-won-t12768

Fig.3 Donald Rodney, section from Preparatory Drawings for the work *Soweto/Guernica* frieze (1988) drawing, 137 x 120cm ©Wolverhampton Art Gallery ©The Estate of Donald Rodney.

Fig.4 David Hockney, *We Two Boys Together Clinging* (1961) oil on board, 121.9 x 152.4cm ©David Hockney. Photo Credit: Prudent Cuming Associates. Collection Arts Council, Southbank Centre, London.

Fig.5 Keith Piper, *Go West Young Man* (1996) film ©Wolverhampton Art Gallery ©Keith Piper. Embedded here with Keith Piper's permission. http://www.keithpiper.info/gowestanim.html

[1] For a study that gives an account of the violent history of the displacement of Native Americans, see Ned Blackhawk, *Violence Over the Land: Indians and Empires in the Early American West* (Cambridge, 2006).

[2] The work is reproduced in Richard Hylton (ed.), *Donald Rodney: Doublethink* (London, 2003), p.48.

[3] Variations occur, for example, in Donald Rodney, Sketchbook 22, 1988, Tate Archive, TGA 200321/3/22 http://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-200321-3-22/rodney-sketchbook-number-22/121 and Donald Rodney, Sketchbook 23, 1988, Tate Archive, TGA 200321/3/23 http://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-200321-3-23/rodney-sketchbook-number-23/41

[4] Donald Rodney, Sketchbook 24, 1988, Tate Archive, TGA 200321/3/24 http://www.tate.org.uk/art/archive/items/tga-200321-3-24/rodney-sketchbook-number-24/67

[5] Eddie Chambers, 'Who'd a Thought It?', *Wasafiri*, 27.3 (2012), p.23.

[6] Eddie Chambers, 'Remembering the Crack of the Whip: African-Caribbean Artists in the UK Visualise Slavery', *Slavery & Abolition*, 34.2 (2013), pp.298–9.

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