

Rhetorics of Displacement: Constructing Identities in Forced Relocations

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Katrina M. Powell

Cultural identities are the points of identification, the unstable points of identification or suture, which are made, within the discourses of history and culture. Not an essence, but a positioning. Hence, there is always a politics of identity, a politics of position.

—Stuart Hall, “Cultural Identity and Diaspora”

Mrs. Shortley had the sudden intuition that the Gobblebooks, like rats with typhoid fleas, could have carried all those murderous ways over the water with them directly to this place. If they had come from where that kind of thing was done to them, who was to say they were not the kind that would also do it to others?

—Flannery O’Connor, “The Displaced Person”

Flannery O’Connor’s short story “The Displaced Person” brilliantly depicts the ways the displaced can be feared. The metaphorical representation of the Guizacs (Mrs. Shortley calls them Gobblehooks) as rats capable of spreading disease illustrates O’Connor’s comment on the ways that exiles from World War II Poland were feared because of their difference, their foreignness, their out-of-placeness.¹ Mrs. Shortley’s depiction of the displaced as diseased or contaminated functions to reify the social order and restore “things to their *proper place*” (Creswell 342; original emphasis). For most of the characters in the story, the Guizacs’ presence upturns the social and racial norms of the farm. The fact that Mr. Guizac was the hardest worker on the McIntyres’ farm does not dispel the deeply held belief that the Guizacs’ displacement forever marked them as suspect, by the owner and by the

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other workers. While O'Connor's story examines several complicated issues about the South; tenant farming; religion; and gender, race, and class relations, O'Connor also examines the geographical and cultural borders crossed by the displaced. My purpose in this essay is to consider the literal and figurative border crossings that occur as bodies, and thus identities, are forcefully displaced.² Doing so heightens our understanding of rhetorics of displacement, particularly as displacement rhetorics by those in power³ come in contact with displacement rhetorics constructed by individuals.

In the sections that follow, I offer first a theoretical framework that informs my thinking about displacement narratives. I briefly examine two published displacement narratives, Spike Lee's *When the Levees Broke* (a documentary film about Hurricane Katrina) and Dave Eggers's *What Is the What* (a novel about a "lost boy" from Sudan). I use these examples as "spectacular rhetorics" of displacement, highlighting the ways that accepted discourses of displacement typically get told.⁴ I then turn to a US eminent domain case, and my participation in the rendering of a narrative about that case, to closely examine the ethical and analytical challenges of constructing such a narrative. Ultimately, I use the case to draw insights into the narratives presented in Lee's documentary and Eggers's novel, commercialized testimonial forms, and I suggest a way of reading such narratives—indeed, constructing such narratives—that further considers the contexts within which they are created.

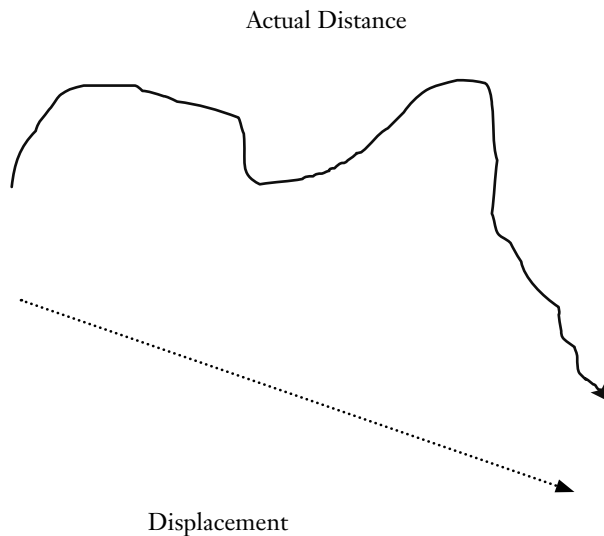
BODIES, IDENTITIES, MOVEMENTS

As displaced bodies move, the identities they inhabit also move. Complexities arise as identities interact and move across space and time as they are displaced from "home."⁵ The inextricable linking of bodies and language produced by and about the body is crucial in understanding how identities are constructed. As I have suggested elsewhere, identities are always, already moving: "Persons in the process of being displaced are on the move—their individual and community identities are in the middle of enormous change" (*Anguish of Displacement* 142), and in this way we "link moving identities with moving bodies" (163). This notion of "moving identities" helps us understand the complex ways that identity construction within relocation can occur (and reoccur). Identity construction within relocation involves literal starting and ending positions, yet bodies end up inhabiting a figurative "third space" or "hybrid identity" to which the displaced move because they cannot fully inhabit the ending position.⁶ Because there is no fixed identity, and identity formation is a process rather than an outcome, identities are constantly being formed, implying a constant, active state.⁷

The *active* nature of displacement is very important in understanding moving identities. Once one has moved physically from one place to another, the act of displacement, the act of reconceptualizing the hybrid identity, continues in an active way and does not end. What's important about this is that one identity does not take over another; rather, a hybrid identity results that incorporates the old and the new. An actual body may be physically removed from a space, but the discursive identity of that body, that is, the stories told by and about that body, are inscribed on that body.⁸ However, the new physical space, the new identity (whether it be refugee, internally displaced person, or traveler through many nations), does not completely overtake the old identity. Displacement is not an overtaking—that would suggest linear movement, a dialectic relationship among identities. Rather, displacement is a meandering path, a combination of many paths, paths not predetermined by place, person, or nation (see Fig. 1).

For many, however, the paths of displacement are violent journeys.⁹ Likewise, the shifting of an identity is arguably violent. That is to say, displacement is a jolt to one's sense of self—a jolt to one's identity. If we think of displacement not in terms of moving from one place to another, which suggests a journey that ends, but rather in terms of transition, displacement then becomes a temporal space where identities are in metonymic relation to one another. Narratives of forced displacement are typically a resistance to that liminal space—such displacement is a shattering of

Figure 1. Displacement as movement



identity, one that is forced rather than chosen (as in recreational travel).¹⁰ Though this may seem obvious given the violence of genocide or natural disaster, it may not be as obvious when considering displacements due to the widening of roads or the establishment of a public utility.

The complexities of terms such as hybridity, internally displaced, forced displacement, resettlement, colonized, dispossessed, relocated, asylum seeker, and refugee¹¹ are reflected in the many volumes that engage in practical and ideological discussions of the terms across disciplines, including cultural geography (Lavie and Swedenburg; Silvey), the study of human rights (Baxi; Nyers; Hesford, *Spectacular Rhetorics*), and migration studies (Kunz). Many scholars address the ways in which these terms blend, and note that discussions surrounding one term have implications for the others. Across various events such as forced relocation, civil war, natural disaster, land condemnation, and recreational travel, for instance, each of these terms exhibits varying qualities. Therefore, in the complex interaction of identities that move across space and time as they are displaced from home, the actual distance is complex and layered, with implications for our understanding of the narrative representations of these identities.

Rhetorics of displacement, then, are those strategies that account for discourses of power and discourses of identity. As autobiography, rhetoric, and human rights scholars tell us (Schaffer and Smith; Lyon and Olson; Hesford and Kozol; Merry; Nyers; Slaughter; Afshari), rhetorics of displacement are deeply embedded in the resistances to the subjectivities inscribed for the displaced by those who have power over them, including tyrannical governments, United Nations (UN) aid workers, Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) administrators, and legislators. As individuals speak back to institutions of power, certain displacement identities are resisted. Displacement narratives written *about* the displaced often go through a process of *othering* whereby they blame the victim, have particular notions of citizenry, and at worse, dehumanize the displaced through metaphors of savagery.¹² Conversely yet relatedly, the rhetorical strategies used *by* the displaced to speak back to those narratives include nostalgia, a particular sense of home, belonging, citizenry, and the right of return.¹³ Two texts coming out of seemingly disparate displacement events are examples of the ways that the displaced speak back to discourses of power. Lee's film *When the Levees Broke* and Eggers's novel *What Is the What* are kinds of narratives that respond, specifically, to dominant displacement discourses.

In addition to academic studies about the socioeconomic and racial implications of Hurricane Katrina, many oral history, music, art, and poetry projects have documented the experience of the storm and flooding, and of the resulting displacements. One such creative expression is Lee's 2006 documentary. In this film, Lee interviews several residents, lawmakers, and musicians, weaving a complex narrative that comments on factors leading up to the breach of the levees. Lee provides footage

of the hurricane and its aftermath, closely following the stories of several citizens of New Orleans as they return (or do not return) to the city after the flooding. Like any other media representation, the film drives a particular narrative. Lee's political motivation is to highlight the incompetence of the US government in helping before, during, and after the hurricane. The people interviewed in the film counter narratives told about them, while also constructing a sense of nationhood and of belonging to the city.

As Lee is careful to portray in the film, the media were greatly criticized for their reporting during the first few days of the flooding in New Orleans after Katrina. Most of the images on major news channels narrowly depicted poor African American families struggling to survive.¹⁴ Indeed, by including these images in the documentary, and by noting the media's use of the term "refugee" to describe survivors, Lee constructs his narrative to reveal the racist undertones of the coverage.

It's likely that many Americans would define "refugees" as people of color who are poor and who need assistance during a time of crisis. Consistent with this view, usually the media's reporting on refugees displays images of Africans in camps as they seek political asylum. But the term refugee is problematic in the case of New Orleans, even as it fits a predominant American narrative. As Lee's film highlights, Al Sharpton responded to this labeling of New Orleans residents with strong criticism; at a Congressional Black Caucus meeting on September 5, 2005, he formally requested that the media not refer to New Orleans' citizens as refugees: "We are calling on the media to stop calling them refugees. These are American citizens that in most cases were very viable taxpayers [. . .] and the inference, the connotation of refugees is like they are some others from somewhere lost needing charity." Sharpton was pointing to the official UN definition of a refugee: "one who is persecuted by his or her country and feels unsafe in returning"—a political status that one must interview and "qualify" for (United Nations, "Conducting"). At the same time, Sharpton's call reveals a deeply American fear of being thought of as a refugee. Indeed, it is possible that blackness itself is a marker of refugee-ness for white Americans. In any case, refugee narratives are deeply rooted in otherness, and Sharpton's call acknowledged New Orleansians' refusal to be further othered.

This rhetoric of othering, with deep racial roots in this country, was also exemplified in a comment by FEMA director Michael Brown. He said shortly after the hurricane, "I don't make judgments about why people chose not to leave but, you know, there was a mandatory evacuation of New Orleans" (Brown). The implication was that those who did not evacuate broke the law. Further, Brown directly stated that people who stayed *chose* to stay, implying that they blatantly disregarded the mandate. In fact, many who stayed often did not have a choice—they had no access to transportation. Brown's statement placed the victims in an other status in at least two ways. First, Brown implied that had he been under mandate to evacuate,

he would have left—he would have followed the law. In addition, though Brown began his statement, “I don’t make judgments,” his statement is indeed one, revealing that he lacked understanding of the city’s socioeconomic and racial conditions while upholding a classic national narrative about being able to take care of oneself. This class marking, together with racial marking in the media, served as a process of othering that rhetorically placed African Americans in a refugee status.

Brown’s comments, heard on national television as millions watched the general media coverage of the hurricane, also had a great effect on the stories told about the hurricane victims and, as in any such situation, influenced how the nation understood the stories of the displaced. In his film, then, Lee focuses much of the interview footage on the refugee issue.¹⁵ Joseph Melancon, for instance, says with exasperation, “When I heard them call us refugees, I couldn’t do nothing but drop my head because you see I’m a United States citizen of America. Call *me* a refugee?!” In disgust, Melancon voices what others felt. As a US citizen, he was insulted at being considered a refugee. His inflection indicates that he understands why the public, particularly whites, would be predisposed to see the black and poor of New Orleans as refugees, and he refuses that label. Similarly, Galen Banks, director of security of the Hyatt Regency hotel in New Orleans, says, “Refugees. I thought that was folks that didn’t have a country, that didn’t have anywhere.” Given the UN definition of refugee, clearly Banks and Melancon have a point. They see themselves as survivors of the hurricane but also as citizens of a rich country—a country that in their understanding does not have refugees. Further, Melancon, like others interviewed for Lee’s film, sees himself as a New Orleansian and therefore as part of the national identity of the United States.

As I explain elsewhere, while on the one hand Melancon refuses the label given him via public narrative, on the other he embraces his national identity and the privileges that should come with it. The narratives of identity by those interviewed in Lee’s film highlight their desire to be part of the national narrative and construct themselves as citizens who belong to that narrative.¹⁶ Many of the interviewees in the film likewise comment on their status as US citizens, even while they criticize the government for mistakes. Audiences of the film are instructed to indict the government for “abandoning” the American public within its borders. Many narratives tended to portray the hurricane survivors as mere victims rather than as citizens, too; yet the narratives in Lee’s film refuse such a story while recognizing the government’s responsibility (Powell, “Public and Private Memories” 169). They refuse, that is, to be counted as outside the space of the United States.

According to the Amnesty International website, there is a move to assign another status to survivors of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita: “Amnesty International joins the rest of the U.S. Human Rights Network to call on the United States government to recognize Katrina survivors as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs)

and to respect and adhere to the *Guiding Principles on Internal Displacement*. This internationally recognized category of concern would provide Katrina survivors with the right to special protections and benefits.”¹⁷ The kinds of protections and benefits provided to survivors could greatly assist residents as they try to rebuild their homes and their lives. However, what does one give up in accepting that label, that marker of displacement? In accepting one of those labels—whether refugee, IDP, or otherwise—one is marked as the displaced, marked as the other, with an expectation to fulfill the refugee story.¹⁸

That story—as well as the rhetorical strategies used to construct it and the identities established within it—is intricately tied to the processes of obtaining refugee status through the UN. Although many residents of New Orleans publicly rejected the label of refugee, normally those seeking political asylum actively seek official refugee status from the UN for protection and financial assistance. When the UN held its convention on the “Status of Refugees” in 1951, it adopted the definition of a refugee as someone who “[o]wing to a well-founded fear of being persecuted for reasons of race, religion, nationality, membership of a particular social group or political opinion, is outside the country of his nationality, and is unable to or, owing to such fear, is unwilling to avail himself of the protection of that country or return there because there is a fear of persecution.”¹⁹ Persons seeking refugee status must fill out a UNHCR (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees) Eligibility Determination Form, and then be invited for an interview by a UN official (with an interpreter if necessary). This form and the accompanying interview ask questions that make certain assumptions about the “applicant” or “claimant” in leading the person through the process of becoming an official refugee.

In the interviewer’s guide, “Conducting the Interview” (or “Training Module”), which accompanies the questionnaire, guidelines for conducting interviews are included, and the document provides interesting insight into the ways that refugees are constructed by the UN. Interviewers are instructed on asking open and closed questions, on how to begin the interview, on how to explain the process, and on how to “control” the interview. They are also provided with sample questions. One section of the guide notes that “as a representative of your organization you are concerned and respectful of his or her distress; but you are to work within a legal framework which imposes certain specific conditions when it comes to eligibility for refugee status.” The guide is explicit that the interviewer sets the tone and must make clear to the applicant what the purpose of the interview is. The interviewer is instructed to determine if the interviewee’s fears of persecution are “well-founded,” and this can be determined only by the person’s narrative. Most of the guidelines discuss strategies through which the interviewer is to solicit the applicant’s narrative. Moreover, both are charged with the responsibility to “present” the facts “convincingly.” This direction explicitly highlights the rhetorical nature of both the interview and the

narrative resulting from it. At the same time, interviewers are told to get “the true story” by identifying “discrepancies in the written and spoken testimonies” (United Nations). UN interviewers, therefore, are placed in an interesting position: they must evaluate the “facts” based in large part on the applicant’s ability to present these facts in such a truthful way as to be convincing. In addition, the UN interview reader (usually and ultimately a decision maker with access to resources) is rhetorically positioned: the trauma is given presence through documentation within UN discourses of human rights.²⁰

Just as Lee’s film highlights the rejection of the label of refugee, Dave Eggers and Valentino Achak Deng’s *What Is the What* discusses the purposeful and strategic rhetorical positioning of one’s story as a refugee story. *What Is the What* is listed as a novel by Eggers but written in Deng’s voice. A finalist for the 2006 National Book Critics Circle Award, it is about Deng’s life as a Sudanese refugee and “lost boy.” In this autobiographical text,²¹ Deng recounts his journey as he fled from his village (destroyed by the Janjaweed) in southern Sudan to refugee camps in Ethiopia and Kenya, and later to an education in the United States. Deng describes his interactions with the UN and his application for refugee status, a grueling and multilayered process with many disappointments.

The constructed nature of this autobiographical novel makes explicit some of the issues of witnessing and constructing displacement narratives addressed in Lee’s documentary. Like Lee’s film, where the seemingly “authentic” oral histories are framed and reframed to develop audiences’ critical responses, Deng’s fictional autobiography as constructed by McSweeney’s editor and well-known author Eggers is also highly stylized. The construction of the novel addresses questions about genre and identity, and Deng addresses the rhetorical rendering of an identity within his story of becoming a refugee. For instance, in order to be able to leave the refugee camps for political asylum in the United States, Deng (through Eggers) says, “The first step in leaving Kakuma [a Kenyan resettlement camp] was the writing of our autobiographies” (485). As the novel explains, the discursive act of writing their stories was crucial in obtaining refugee status. Deng and his friends knew that the UN expected a certain kind of story. He says, “Each of us has a half dozen identities: There are the nicknames, there are the catechism names, the names we adopted to survive or to leave Kakuma. Having many names has been necessary for many reasons that refugees know intimately” (260). Deng explains that while he and the other boys took on many identities as a matter of survival, they also were very aware of the discursive expectations of the UN and the stories that those sympathetic to their plight *expected* to hear. In discussing the experiences of the refugees from southern Sudan, Deng explains, “[W]e did not all see the same things [. . .] our routes were very different. Some arrived with their parents. Others with rebel soldiers. A few thousand traveled alone. But now, sponsors and newspaper reporters and the like expect the stories to

have certain elements, and the Lost Boys have been consistent in their willingness to oblige. Survivors tell the stories the sympathetic want, and that means making them as shocking as possible. My own story includes enough small embellishments that I cannot criticize the accounts of others” (21). For Deng, creating a narrative asked for by the UN workers was a means for leaving the camps; indeed, the label “lost boys” evokes a symbolic narrative—they are lost until they are able to write their story, and if the story is good enough, they can come to the United States for an education. This narrative process of labeling, then, illustrates the way the UN acts as an institution driving the discursive structures of the refugee.²²

While Deng sought the label, New Orleans residents resisted the implications of the term “refugee.” New Orleans residents may have been resisting the process of othering, but they also resisted the temporary status imposed on the displaced. Ironically, the temporariness can last a long time. As Deng explains, “There is a perception in the West that refugee camps are temporary [. . .] [M]ost Westerners believe that these refugees will soon be returned to their homes, that the camps will be dismantled inside of six months, perhaps a year. But I grew up in refugee camps. I lived in Pinyudo for almost three years, Golkur for almost one year, and Kakuma for ten” (370). Likewise, more than five years after Hurricane Katrina, people still live in FEMA trailers, and many have not been able to return to the city. Deng describes how the UN provided the materials to build tents in the refugee camps and instructed the boys to build them, “and so we did” (372). Similarly, thousands of North Face tents were donated to displaced New Orleans families (who didn’t qualify for FEMA trailers), who subsequently pitched them under the I-10 overpass—a tent city that remained for at least four years after the storm. Deng points out the implication for the kind of interaction he and his friends had with the UN: “we became dependent on the UN for everything” (374). He not only depended on the UN for food and shelter, but this dependence infiltrated his sense of his identity. He says about writing his UN essay,

The UNHCR and the United States wanted to know where we had come from, what we had endured. We were to write our stories in English [. . .] [W]e were asked to write about the civil war, about losing our families, about our lives in the camps. [. . .] Whichever strategy we applied, we knew that our stories had to be well told [. . .] How could I put everything down on paper? It seemed impossible. No matter what, the majority of life would be left out of this story, this sliver of a version of the life I’d known. (485)

The rule was to discursively represent the story, documenting it on paper in the colonizing language of English in order for it to count. Deng inwardly resisted this rhetorical rendering even as he *did* it. His book’s exposing of the process, which makes clear his knowledge of its constructed nature, is a way to resist now the discursive identity that has been imposed on him, even if he used it to get to the United States.

The layered aspects of providing aid to families in need while maintaining some sort of agency for them are fraught with complication. According to political scientist Peter Nyers, humanitarian discourses are complexly problematic. The UN Eligibility Determination Form can function to desensitize an audience to displacement issues (Nyers 129), because it tends to depoliticize them. That is, because the current classification scheme characterizes refugee identity as nonpolitical, refugees are made speechless and invisible (128–29). Nyers further argues that the concept of *refugee*, like the concept of *state*, is a construct, created and sustained through continual political activity (xi). He calls for assumptions about refugee identity to be rethought, because the label is often pejorative even when used by those trying to “help.” Nyers points out that poetry readings, oral histories, and other activist publications (such as Eggers’s) that give so-called public voice to refugees can actually serve to reify hierarchies of race, class, and gender. We expect refugee narratives to have certain components, including a stated need for institutional assistance. Ultimately, then, human rights discourses can function to create a distance between the so-called refugee and the public.

Nyers’s critical lens on human rights discourses sheds further light on the ways that refugees, or the displaced more generally, can be outside the “law” because of their statelessness. So in Sudan, for instance, according to *shari’a* law, the southern Sudanese are outside the law, as many are not Muslim. Further, refugees have no state.²³ When political dissidents seek asylum, they must show through highly politicized narratives their discursive identities as displaced or refugee. The implications of the discursive representation have a profound impact on an individual’s and a community’s sense of identity. The person is the same, but the identity constructed must fit the “law” of the UN, and at any moment that identity could be taken away. By this logic, New Orleans residents, especially those who did not follow the mandate to evacuate, were outside the law and consequently easily labeled refugees.

When displaced persons are forced out of their homes because of natural disaster or war, we expect their stories to fulfill certain narrative expectations of othered-ness, victimization, and dependence on the state.²⁴ Displaced persons are simultaneously not of the state yet dependent on it. As a result, certain discursive identities are expected to be conveyed in a displacement narrative, and Lee’s film and Eggers’s novel illustrate the strategies used. And as human rights scholars have suggested, examples like these illustrate the tensions and contradictions at work as narratives about displacement get solicited and told. But when families are displaced because of developments such as roads or public parks, in what ways are they rendered displaceable? What are the ethical and analytical challenges at work when people are displaced from their homes for the “public good”?

**EMINENT DOMAIN LAW AND CONSTRUCTIONS OF LAWLESSNESS:
RESETTLEMENTS FOR THE PUBLIC GOOD (OR, WHO IS DISPLACEABLE)**

The right to own property implies that some other might own it; property right would not need to be assured by law if this were not the case. The self-identity of ownership is constitutively divided by the possibility of transference, the possibility, necessarily inscribed in property right, of someone else's potential ownership of the same thing. The infinite displaceability of property is at once affirmed and denied by property right [. . .] Property right, therefore, is not something inherent or proper to a person; it is the denial of commonality and displaceability.

—Michael Ryan, *Displacement: Derrida and After* (159)

[T]he commission is hereby expressly vested with the power of eminent domain to condemn for use as a public park or for public park purposes, and to acquire title to all or any part of the lands described in sections three and four hereof, including dwelling houses, outbuildings, orchards, yards, gardens, and other improvements on such lands, and, all or any right, title, or interest in or to all or any part of such lands, and the improvements thereon, by the exercise of the right of eminent domain in condemnation proceedings or by gift, devise, purchase, or any other lawful means for the transfer of title.

—1928 Public Park Condemnation Act of the Virginia General Assembly

I now turn to an eminent domain case, not simply as another kind of displacement among many, though that argument could be made. Rather, I use this case, particularly my participation in constructing a narrative about it, as a way to interrogate the limits of current theories of displacement. As Kay Schaffer and Sidonie Smith point out in *Human Rights and Narrated Lives*, international rights discourses enable and constrain individual and collective subjectivities in the ways narratives get told. In their work, the authors examine the ways that personal narratives take on varied meanings, interpretations, and uses depending on context. In displacements produced by natural disaster and war, tensions between narratives of identity and the law occur when there come into question such matters as “the right of return,” a case in which the displaced look back toward home with nostalgia and a sense of belonging.²⁵ However, when displacements result from eminent domain, there is no right of return—at least not within the law. Moving from commercialized testimonial forms, I now examine a way of reading such narratives—indeed, constructing such narratives—that considers “the material-rhetorical context” in which the narrative is offered.²⁶ In institutional discourses of displacement, the law supersedes any narrative of individuals who are being displaced. As such, the law rarely takes into account the gendered, classed, and racialized narratives of displacement by individuals. When the displaced try to speak, or when their individual discourses come in contact with and resist the dominant discourses (that is, law), then they are immediately considered outside the law. They become outlaws and are often immediately silenced and

literally moved out of sight so that the displacement can continue. Mary Frances Corbin Donald's displacement narrative is one that has been silenced in this way.

In the 1930s, Mary Frances Corbin's extended family was displaced through eminent domain law from the mountains of Virginia so that Shenandoah National Park could be formed.²⁷ More than 500 families were removed from their homes under Virginia's Public Park Condemnation Act of 1928.²⁸ Many families found housing elsewhere, but some families needed government assistance to find alternative living arrangements. Those who were eligible for a government-assisted loan were able to move to resettlement housing, going through an eligibility process whereby their finances were examined to determine whether they could repay the government loan for a "homestead." Families who were not able to qualify for loans were placed under the care of the newly formed Department of Public Welfare.²⁹ Social workers found alternative housing for a few families, and several were sent to state hospitals after being labeled "feeble-minded."

"Feeble-minded" was one of the categories used during the Progressive era of social reform to label people with a range of mental disabilities. Commonly, the term was also used to judge those whose behavior (such as "fits" or "hysteria") was considered distasteful at best and a menace to society at worst. There were several hospitals across the country in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries where the feeble-minded were committed. One such hospital existed about 100 miles from Shenandoah National Park: the Lynchburg Colony for Epileptics and Feeble-minded, otherwise known as the Colony.

According to Mary Bishop, the Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist who reported on several people who lived in the Colony and on the eugenics movement in Virginia, more than 60,000 Americans were "rounded up, judged genetically inferior, held in government asylums, and sterilized against their wills. Some were mentally retarded; many were not. Most were poor, uneducated country people—orphans, petty criminals, juvenile delinquents, epileptics, and sexually active single women. All were people that those in power, from social workers to legislators and judges, saw as threats to the nation's gene supply" (13). When the US Supreme Court upheld Virginia's sterilization laws in 1927, Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes Jr. famously stated about Carrie Buck's family, "Three generations of imbeciles is enough." "Imbecile" and "feeble-minded" were categories of the pseudoscience of eugenics, a movement that Holmes's statement and the court case generally emboldened. Indeed, Carrie Buck was a patient at the Colony, whose doctors joined those of several other hospitals across the state in sterilizing some 8,000 Virginians—one of whom was Mary Frances Corbin.³⁰

Finnell Corbin, Mary Frances's grandfather, owned nineteen acres in the mountains of central Virginia. The Corbins were a large family in the area, well known by the officials in charge of the relocations.³¹ After being paid the "just compensation"

of \$530 for his land (Lambert 292), Finnell was labeled feeble-minded and sent to a similar hospital in Staunton. Various members of his family were also sent away, including his daughter-in-law Sallie and her five children, one of whom was eleven-year-old Mary Frances. Finnell's son and Mary Frances's father, Harrison, had died, and his widow and their children were sent to the Colony in 1941, presumably because the state did not know what else to do with them. From 1934 to 1941, more than thirty people who had been living within the park's boundaries, approximately fifteen of whom were children, were sent to Lynchburg or Staunton.³²

The process of displacement and relocation was a series of complicated events involving various state and federal agencies, including the State Commission on Conservation and Development, the Virginia Department of Public Welfare, the Resettlement Administration (part of the US Department of Agriculture), and the US National Park Service (NPS); also involved were private doctors and teachers from the area. The Corbin family did not qualify for resettlement loans—they were subsistence farmers and in need of assistance to find some other location because their homes were forcibly taken away. In addition to the government officials involved, several researchers and medical professionals worked with families, documenting their needs and providing pro bono medical services. Miriam Sizer was a teacher and self-fashioned social worker who had been hired to conduct “surveys” on the families in the area, to determine their needs in relocating. Her “Tabulations” were the basis of an inflammatory book, *Hollow Folk*, written by Mandel Sherman and Thomas Henry and published in 1933. This book and Sizer's conclusions about families were used as evidence to make a case that families should be moved for better access to education and medical services. But the book's methods and its judgments about families were questionable; today, the findings would be interpreted in terms of poverty rather than intelligence.³³

After completing her initial surveys, Sizer sought further employment with the US Department of the Interior to continue assisting families in their relocations. A well-known doctor wrote a letter of reference for her to the director of the National Park Service. Dr. Roy Sexton, a medical professional involved in the families' medical care and a founding member of the Potomac Appalachian Trail Club, suggested to NPS director Horace Albright that Sizer continue working with families. As he explained Sizer's qualifications in his recommendation letter, Sexton said,

This is to illustrate the unusual reaction of these mountain people and to bring out the fact that someone who has known them for a long time will be needed in this work, as they immediately resent the suggestions of the average person. The better class of mountaineer will be easy to handle. The lower type will be most difficult and it is this lowest type that Miss Sizer is best acquainted with [. . .] After the present census has been made and arrangements made for moving out and *colonizing the worst of these people*, it is possible that a man, with a general knowledge of the value of cabins, hogs,

cows and other equipment, together with a personal acquaintance with the mountain families and a knowledge of their psychology would be needed to complete the work. (Sexton; emphasis added)

Sexton's description of the difficulty in "handling" mountain families likely meant that they resisted being moved from their homes. When Sexton wrote, "colonizing the worst of these people," he meant sending families to the Colony in Lynchburg. Medical professionals, state officials, and social workers sanctioned the relocation of families to these hospitals, well known for their eugenics practices and discourses. The implication of this letter, and the fact that some poor families from the park were sent to the Colony, is that the state sanctioned the relocation and sterilization of families.

In 2009, wanting to document displacement narratives about families who had lost their homes when Virginia condemned their land, filmmaker Richard Knox Robinson and I combined our efforts. He had been working on a documentary film about Farm Security Administration (FSA) photographer Arthur Rothstein, who had been sent to Virginia in 1935 to photograph families being displaced during

Figure 2. Mary Frances Corbin, pictured in her home in Lynchburg, Virginia, with the author. Copyright 2010 by Richard Knox Robinson. Used with permission.



the founding of Shenandoah National Park. I had been conducting archival and oral history research on displaced families, and we decided to conduct several interviews together. Some of these became part of Robinson's documentary film, *Rothstein's First Assignment*. One was an interview with Mary Frances Corbin, pictured in Figure 2 in her Lynchburg home.

Originally, *Rothstein's First Assignment* was conceived to retrace Rothstein's steps in taking photographs of families living in what would become Shenandoah National Park. Rothstein photographed many members of Mary Frances's family (images are available for public viewing at www.memory.loc.gov). Part of Roy Stryker's team (together with other FSA photographers Dorothea Lange and Walker Evans), Rothstein was tasked to document the Depression in the park.³⁴ As Robinson revisited the places Rothstein had photographed and interviewed descendants of the people in Rothstein's pictures, a process of discovery began. The film narrative consequently takes a turn different from what was originally planned, and highlights this process of discovery, juxtaposing Mary Frances's and others' interviews, Department of the Interior archival film, and court records. What Robinson's film does that many commercialized forms do not is reveal the ways that the *process* of research leads to connections. In this case, the sharing of archival research and collaborative interviews led to the discovery of a connection between Rothstein's government assignment and the eugenics movement. *Rothstein's First Assignment* questions the impetus for Rothstein's photographs and connects them with eugenics field studies (refer to www.robinsonphoto.com/film.html for information about the filmmaker's work). Indeed, several of Rothstein's photographs are captioned using terms such as "half-wit" and "squatter."³⁵ Like the term "refugee," "squatter" implies not having a fixed address and was used in derogatory ways to describe someone dependent on assistance.

In the film, Robinson was concerned with highlighting the staged nature of documentary film, photography, and storytelling. Both of us were aware of the implications of retelling and reappropriating Mary Frances's stories, and throughout the process of interviewing, filming, editing, and screening, we tried to remain "mindful of how rhetorical acts of witnessing may function as new forms of international tourism and appropriation" (Hesford, "Documenting Violations" 121).³⁶ Thanks to reporter Bishop, who had interviewed Mary Frances years earlier, Robinson and I were able to find and interview Mary Frances for the film. We asked her many questions about her memories of her family, how she came to the Colony, and what she thought about the way her family members were made to leave their homes. She hardly fit Sexton's description, and Mary Frances was crucial in helping us connect some of the gaps we had in our research about her family's genealogy. When Robinson and I asked her about her family and whether particular members of it were sent to the Colony, Mary Frances responded, "I remember they took my brother and two sisters first [. . .] that's all I know. They said everybody was feeble-minded [. . .]"

My mama was taken away too.” During our interview, we showed Mary Frances several Rothstein photographs she had never seen of her extended family members. Her caretaker called a few days later to say that Mary Frances had requested copies of the photographs. This was a significant moment for Robinson, who wrote of this on his blog:

When I started going through Rothstein’s archive to make [Mary Frances’s] copies, it was then that I comprehended how closely related the majority of Rothstein’s subjects were. Rothstein’s archive on this assignment was essentially Mary Frances’s family album. Most of Rothstein’s photographs were of her family. This realization was all the more stunning since Mary Frances didn’t have any family photographs in her home. Her life had been so disrupted, she hardly knew who her family was.

During her interview, Mary Frances did not tell stories about her family, about her memories of growing up, or about a desire to return, the themes that usually make up displacement narratives. Many of the residents of the Colony (according to Bishop’s reporting) felt a deep shame when released, and many stayed in Lynchburg near others who had once been committed to the Colony. Mary Frances married a local man and has remained in Lynchburg, though presumably she has been “free” to return to the county of her birth. In discourses about Shenandoah National Park, and in most contested eminent domain cases, there is a longing for home, a longing to return to the beauty of the mountains that was wrongfully “taken” by the government through its condemnation law. Mary Frances’s narrative does not construct such a longing. Rather, she quietly reclaimed the members of her family by asking for their photographs.

At her home, on the end table next to Mary Frances’s wheelchair, rested a spiral notebook, opened to a page full of writing. When I looked at the notebook after our interview, I could see that the writing said “Mary” repeated over and over across the page. I pointed to the notebook and asked her, “Is this your writing?” She said, “Oh, yes. I’m practicing my name” (see Fig. 2). What Sexton wrote about her and her family and other families in the area is not reflected in that notebook. Mary’s displacement narrative does not constitute a novel, is perhaps not as eloquent as Eggers and Deng’s *What Is the What*, is not as impassioned as Melancon’s account in *When the Levees Broke*. Her story is one of a state-sanctioned removal, under false pretenses, that prevented her from obtaining formal education and from bearing children. But the repetition of her name, in her handwriting, under her own terms, refuses the kinds of conclusions about a person that might be drawn upon hearing that story. She writes her name, she asks for her family’s photographs, and she refuses any label but “Mary.”

Creating a version of Mary Frances’s story through documentary film (and indeed this essay) has several kinds of implications. Her narrative, and the film created

around her narrative, asks audiences to reconsider what a displacement narrative *is*. As the subtitle of his film suggests (*A Film about Documentary Truth*), Robinson was explicitly conscious of issues of form, of the way that documentary is constructed, of the obtrusiveness of the camera, and of the role of the filmmaker and the interviewer in constructing a certain kind of displacement narrative. Relatedly, human rights rhetoric scholars Arabella Lyon and Lester Olson say, “The promise and pitfalls attending the roles of those who witness and testify are complex and, at times, can be hazardous for already harmed individuals and communities, a factor which rhetoricians are well prepared to critique with attention to motives, since ‘protection’ can be a euphemism for taking control, while ‘support,’ in contrast, can meaningfully enhance the agency of affected populations” (207). As Robinson’s blog postings and our countless hours of phone conversations suggest, we constantly struggled with the form and act of creating testimony, by continually and critically attending to our motivations as well as by exposing the way the film was made and the research conducted. As we imagine additional ways of representing Mary Frances’s and others’ stories (such as digital archives with public access on the Web), how do we manage the tension between the simultaneous voyeuristic and empowering potential of documenting this moment in American history?³⁷

The implications of this forcible removal of bodies, and of the forcible preventing of births within an entire group of people, loom in this region of central Virginia. The forced naming of some of the park’s residents as “feebleminded”—and thus subject to the dominant discourses of the state—resulted in violations of their human rights. These violations relate even to transnational human rights concerns, and therefore Mary Frances’s story brings us back to the UN discourses on human rights. Just as the UN serves as the defining agency for “refugee,” it also provides the definition of genocide as

- any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical, racial or religious group, as such:
- (a) Killing members of the group;
 - (b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
 - (c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
 - (d) Imposing measures intended to prevent births within the group;
 - (e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.
- (Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, United Nations, Article 2)

Although it might be difficult to argue that the displacements of families from Shenandoah National Park constitute genocide,³⁸ I point to this UN definition because it holds implications for forced relocation more generally. Often human rights concerns are automatically part of the discourse when we examine forced

displacements due to natural disaster or civil unrest. The removals, subsequent sterilizations, and labeling as “feble-minded” or “squatter” ask us to reconsider issues of eminent domain and US government- or state-sanctioned forced removals for the “public good” as human rights issues. The Corbin family, as described by Sexton as “the worst of these people,” fell under this discourse of eugenics because of their poverty. The individuals and agencies charged with the well-being of the displaced families from the park used the language of the eugenics movement to justify placing them in state-run facilities that ended their ability to bear children. If genocide is constructed as including “imposing measures to prevent births,” then what are we to make of the phrase, “colonizing the worst of these people”?

Reductive labels, such as “feble-minded,” served to evoke certain discourses that rendered Mary Frances’s body powerless. Understanding the complexities of displacement narratives as those that invite the reader into particular understandings of displacement challenges us to consider stories like Mary Frances’s as countering narratives of the displaced that depict them as passive agents who contribute to their “out-of-placeness.” Especially when a displacement narrative conforms to expectations of victimhood, nostalgia, and subsequent “saving” by the state, the story remains one that we are used to reading and knowing. However, Mary Frances’s narrative suggests otherwise. The agency of the displaced as emphasized in narratives like Mary’s is evident in what they *do*. They enact agency through their *active* writing of letters, through their refusal to move from their homes, and through their requests for documents or photographs.

Though there is no evidence that Mary Frances has mental disabilities, her name is inscribed in a book located in the Madison county clerk’s office titled, “Those Adjudged to be Insane.” As Robinson researched Mary Frances’s family history, he discovered that many of the names in the book are those of children. Mary Frances was not labeled “refugee” by the UN, she did not write her story, and her few short answers to us provided only some information about her experience of displacement, but her inclusion in the deteriorating book at the clerk’s office marks her as displaced. To label her as “insane” or “feble-minded” meant that her body could be controlled. The regulation of Mary Frances’s body via sterilization was justified by the state because it was thought that she and most of her family members were “undesirables” (see Lombardo; Black; Bishop). As bodies like Mary Frances’s were forcibly removed so that this tourist attraction could be created, medical philosophy and technology regulated those bodies as a means of control and social reform.

Mary Frances’s life story and interview, and subsequent constructions of her life story, raise several questions about displacement narratives. Her story, within the broader story of the 500 displaced families of Shenandoah National Park—or the 5,000 families displaced by the Tennessee Valley Authority, or the thousands displaced in this country for the “public good” of utilities, economic growth, and

urban development—makes a case for the similarities of displacement narratives across events. These similarities warrant careful scrutiny, as policies about eminent domain and displacing families for the public good are made every day in our state legislatures. Her story and others like it point to the difficult ethical and analytical dilemmas in engaging human rights discourses and in how displacement narratives are solicited, told, and disseminated. Who wants these narratives, and how are they used? The UN has asked for such stories to determine not only people's eligibility for refugee status, but also their subsequent eligibility for resources supporting relocation, rebuilding, education, and return. What are the implications for the proliferation and commodification of displacement narratives such as *When the Levees Broke*, *Darfur Diaries* (Marlowe, Bain, and Shapiro), *What Is the What*, or *Rothstein's First Assignment*?

Published narratives are produced with a particular audience in mind, with particular invention strategies that evoke certain displacement tropes. Mary Frances's narrative, however, does something different. Her narrative suggests that rhetoricians should reconsider what constitutes a displacement narrative, including an "empathetic unsettlement predicated upon the inherent incompleteness of the present and the ungovernability of the past" (Hesford, "Documenting Violations" 130). Through social-cultural theories of thinkers such as Giorgio Agamben and Judith Butler, human rights scholars have called into question the notion of testimony and witnessing through human rights discourses. As Nikolas Rose suggests, "[T]he biological lives of individual human beings are recurrently subject to judgments of worth" (21). That is, human rights laws set up exclusionary language, making hierarchical decision-making parameters that deem the dispossessed as "worthy" of saving. The judicial power to make decisions about human life simultaneously includes violence: the violence involved in constituting the law and the violence that sustains it (as understood by Agamben through Walter Benjamin). Therefore, in documenting stories such as Mary Frances's, we are cautioned to recognize the limits of human rights discourses, yet also compelled to understand the ways that the dispossessed are "excluded exclusions, those for whom there exists no possibility of return. Legal abandonment is produced through all kinds of institutions and at multiple scales. But, in almost every case, the victim of banishment is represented as causing his or her own exile, torture and/or immiseration" (Mitchell 102). The film *Rothstein's First Assignment* is an example of countering this kind of story. Robinson's film examines the multiple rhetorical ways that Rothstein's photographs were used. While they were ostensibly to document the poor in the rural South, and to raise awareness of the devastation of the Depression and hence convince legislators to vote for social reform policies (which had problems but which also were helpful), the photographs were at the same time used against individuals to prove their "unworthiness" as citizens and to hide them away in asylums.

The history of Shenandoah National Park has been fraught with tension from the beginning, and Mary Frances's new perspective alters our understanding of the ways that eminent domain law can be enacted and the long-term human rights consequences of such enactments. In addition, the creation of this documentary challenges us to consider the tensions of human rights testimony in general, and explores how "documenting human rights violations is paradoxical in that violence is often represented in order to resist it" (Hesford, "Documenting Violations" 107).³⁹ By retelling Mary Frances's story, we do indeed reappropriate it, but we do so with a self-consciousness about the ethical dimensions of that retelling.

Naming individuals as displaced (or "refugee" or "feeble-minded") is a way to mark them as other, and discursively binds them with narrative expectations of displacement. As these three examples suggest, however, marking the displaced as other is a way of categorizing fears, like Mrs. Shortley's, so that the other remains at a distance from ourselves. The displacement story thus remains not our story, but the story of the other. However, the vast commodification of these narratives suggests a resonance, the fear we recognize of being forcibly out of place. These illustrations and Mary Frances's story in particular highlight the potential for examining the similarities and differences across displacement events further so that we might understand the ways in which people are rendered displaceable and the jolt to identity that occurs when one is displaced, no matter the circumstance.

Author's Note: It was during my collaboration on oral history interviews with filmmaker Richard Knox Robinson that I was made aware of the dramatic connection between the eugenics movement of Virginia and the displacements of Shenandoah National Park. I wish to thank Richard for his uncovering of several crucial resources that, added to my own archival research, has led to this story. I also wish to acknowledge Mary Bishop's reporting, and her help in locating Mary Frances for an interview. Special thanks to my writing group Meta Carstarphen and Janice Edwards. Thanks to my generous colleagues at Virginia Tech who have read drafts of this essay: Bernice Hausman, Gena Chandler, Emily Satterwhite, Minjeong Kim, and Laura Gillman. Thanks also to Kathleen Dixon, John Schilb, and an anonymous reviewer for their insightful comments and suggestions. I greatly appreciate Mary Frances Corbin and other interviewees for sharing their stories.

ENDNOTES

1. For a discussion of metaphors of displacement that describe people and actions as "out-of-place," see cultural geographer Tim Cresswell's essay "Weeds, Plagues, and Bodily Secretions."

2. Angelika Bammer's collection, *Displacements*, is also concerned with the "relationship between the experience of cultural displacement and the construction of cultural identity" (xiv).

3. The notion of expected discourses of identity is informed by Michel Foucault's notion of power. Relations of power include systematic categorizing, a way of placing individuals within certain contexts, as a way of knowing and distinguishing. However, this system is not merely repressive, for "where there is power, there is resistance" (95). That is, a system of power and its categories gives us something to fight

against. However, I seek to move away from the problematic of agency and autonomy to focus instead on how normative discourses come to being and relate to each other and to institutional practices. Doing so allows us to explore *how* power functions within these discourses.

4. See Wendy Hesford's *Spectacular Rhetorics*.

5. This notion of "moving identities" is informed by Debra Hawhee's explanation of moving bodies. Working from Kenneth Burke's "(Nonsymbolic) Motion/(Symbolic) Action," Hawhee points out that Burke's concepts of motion and action are not dichotomous, as many scholars mistakenly think. She concludes, "Bodies and language, then, are irreducibly distinct and yet parallel and complementary, mediated by sensation and attitude—at times undermining, at others duplicating each other, but often, if not always, in effect moving together" (166).

6. My understanding of third space liminality and hybrid identity is informed by both Homi Bhabha and Trinh Minh-ha. As Bhabha explains, the third space is that liminal space where hybrid identities exist. Bhabha stresses the interdependence of the colonizer and colonized. He argues that all cultural systems and statements are constructed in what he calls the "Third Space of Enunciation." He hopes that "by exploring this 'Third Space,' we may elude the politics of polarity and emerge as the others of ourselves" (38–39). This liminality, the space where boundaries dissolve, is where Minh-ha says that identity is indeterminate. She suggests a refusal of any fixed identity (such as American or Vietnamese), and further argues that identity is a process rather than outcome, a becoming rather than arriving. As neither fully one identity nor the next, it crosses an "in between" space; that is, it crosses borders. Minh-ha's notion of displacement focuses on "our fighting grounds," but also "their site for pilgrimage [. . .] while we turn around and claim them as our exclusive territory, then happily approve, for the divisions between margins and center should be preserved, and as clearly demarcated as possible, if the two positions are to remain intact in their power relations" (*When* 17). Here Minh-ha constructs displacement through active concepts: turn, claim, approve. She insists on "no master territories," so as to resist being classified by those in power. See also her more recent *Elsewhere, within Here* as well as Sara Ahmed's *Strange Encounters*.

7. For an in-depth linguistic discussion of "identity-in-action," see Jan Blommaert's "In and Out of Class, Codes and Control."

8. Nedra Reynolds's *Geographies of Writing* provides an important method of examining the ways that narratives are constructed with relation to space. She says, "[T]he ways in which we imagine space and place have a direct impact on how we imagine writing," such that "spatial metaphors can begin to dominate to the exclusion of materiality" (27).

9. Jacques Derrida's mode of critique offers a way of theorizing the violence of displacement. As Mark Krupnick explains, Derrida does not explore the concept of displacement per se, but it is the "mode" by which he critiques culture and the dominant structures within cultures. According to Krupnick, "Derridean deconstruction proceeds by way of displacement, first reversing the terms of a philosophical opposition, that is, reversing a hierarchy or structure of domination, and then displacing or dislodging the system" (1). In analyzing the displacement of ideas (that is, one critical theory for another), Derrida suggests that while displacement is violent, it is not merely a liberal accepting of one idea over another. Closely analyzing Derrida's interviews in *Positions* (1972), Krupnick explains that the progression of intellectual thought according to Derrida is not "an essentially conservative 'reformulation' that has the effect of keeping the best of the old while adapting to new circumstances. Instead, displacement now refers to a violent intervention intended to shake and demoralize that old order" (Krupnick 12).

10. It is important to note here that similar rhetorics appear in travel narratives. See Caren Kaplan's *Questions of Travel* and the ways that some people travel to difference spaces specifically for that unsettled feeling of being out of place, of reshaping and reconstituting an identity. Indeed, when searching for "displacement" as a keyword in library databases, forced migration, natural disaster, and travel narratives result. See also Stephan Kohl, who concludes that travel narratives are as much about the author's identity as they are about the place.

11. Part of the larger project of which this essay is a piece examines the etymology of several of these terms and the implications for understanding the relationships among them across disciplinary

study. In his discussion of refugee and asylum rights where he engages Immanuel Kant, Hannah Arendt, and others, Derrida states, “The discourse on the refugee, asylum or hospitality, thus risks becoming nothing but pure rhetorical alibis” (13).

12. See Schaffer and Smith’s *Human Rights and Narrated Lives* and Makau Mutua’s “Savages, Victims, and Saviors.”

13. See my chapter “Public and Private Memories” in *Narrative Acts*, where I outline particular narrative strategies that cross types of displacement.

14. See Hazel Rose Markus’s “Confronting Katrina.”

15. One might also question whether the subject came up organically during interviews, or if interviewees were prompted to comment on the incident. This speaks to issues of interviewing techniques driving narratives that I address later in the essay, where the answers might be predicated based on the questions. The various ways that this information is collected, recorded, edited, and disseminated raises concerns about the diverse ways that the data can be interpreted. Although I do not fully address issues of methodology here (I do in my larger project, of which this essay is a part), I point to this matter because of the tension between collecting these stories and making them available, and their narrative effect on the various kinds of audiences that see them.

16. See Madeleine Arnot’s *Educating the Gendered Citizen*, which discusses the ways that the notion of citizen is constructed in educational systems around the globe.

17. See “Domestic Human Rights” and also the IDP Voices website <http://www.idpvoices.org/>.

18. See Michael Lane Bruner’s *Strategies of Remembrance*, particularly the chapter “The Rhetorical Dimension of National Identity.” Similarly, as a trope of stability (Curry 506), being within the “nation” is constructed as desirable to be understood as a citizen with an identity, one that is largely accepted as stable and true.

19. The definition of “refugee” was adopted on July 28, 1951, by the United Nations Conference of Plenipotentiaries on the Status of Refugees and Stateless Persons convened under General Assembly Resolution 429 (V) of December 14, 1950, and entered into force on April 22, 1954, in accordance with Article 43.

20. Narrative and storytelling in ethnographic, social science, and anthropological work of refugee studies have been controversial, and as Marita Eastmond says, “[N]arratives are vital in the research process, but also offer considerable challenges as a methodology” (249).

21. In an interview with Deng and Eggers, both explain the development of the book and the decisions to write the book in Deng’s voice yet also to have Eggers fictionalize certain events for narrative development. Whether to label the book autobiographical fiction or creative nonfiction is an issue addressed in the introduction of the book and raises narrative questions about the generic expectations of displacement narratives and the audiences that are constructed in creating those narratives.

22. See the works of Hesford and Nyers, who discuss the implications of human rights discourses. See also Blommaert’s linguistic analysis on the refugee interview process.

23. Arendt, in her discussion of the history of human rights laws generally and the persecution of Jews particularly, examines international laws about “displaced persons” and the “stateless.” As displaced persons, the Jews had no state; and in relation to law, the displaced are outside of it. Although the Nazis were responsible for the displacement, the laws of nearby countries worked to exacerbate the problems—placing a Jewish displaced alien outside the law. Discussions of displacement are often bound to historical discussions of Jewish displacement. Though the Jewish Holocaust is not examined here, I recognize the ways in which displacement studies are grounded in work about the Holocaust. Arendt says, “The postwar term ‘displaced persons’ was invented during the war for the express purpose of liquidating statelessness once and for all by ignoring its existence. Nonrecognition of statelessness always means repatriation, i.e., deportation to a country of origin, which either refuses to recognize the prospective repatriate as a citizen, or, on the contrary, urgently wants him back for punishment.” (279). She also notes, “Matters would not have been quite so bad if this had meant that people no longer clung so closely to their nationality and were ready eventually to be assimilated into another national community. But this was not at all the case” (282).

24. Race is also clearly a part of this discursive process. In the example that follows, the people displaced were white. However, their poverty marked them as displaceable.

25. As Janet Walker explains using Cathy Caruth's theories about trauma narratives, the right of return acts as a major trope in displacement narratives. Walker argues that situated testimonies such as those in Lee's documentary film are highly constructed, edited, and recast to fit the filmmaker's overall message. Indeed, any interview process, whether for documentary, oral history, or humanitarian aid, is working within the framework of the interviewer.

26. Similarly, "Critics within feminist, postcolonial, and transnational feminist studies in particular have questioned such conceptions [of the 'mediated nature of the genre of the testimonial'], and proposed that we consider not only the social location of the speaker or writer, but the material-rhetorical context into which the utterance or text is projected." (Hesford, "Documenting" 108).

27. Elsewhere I have written about this displacement through the study of letters written in the 1930s by the displaced families. See Powell, *The Anguish of Displacement* and "*Answer at Once*."

28. Suit was brought again the Commonwealth of Virginia in the late 1920s by Robert Via, who claimed that his civil rights were infringed when Virginia forced him to sell his land to the state. The US Supreme Court refused to hear the case, essentially upholding Virginia's Supreme Court decision that the mountainous land in central Virginia could be legally condemned for "public use," landowners forced to sell at a "fair market price," and the land consequently "donated" to the federal government in order to form a national park.

29. See Elna C. Green's important work on the history of public welfare, and in particular, Virginia's history of these programs.

30. Virginia's Eugenic Sterilization Act of 1924 was repealed much later, in 1974. See Paul Lombardo for a history of eugenics in Virginia, <http://www.hsl.virginia.edu/historical/eugenics/>, Edwin Black's *The War against the Weak*, and Susan Currell and Christina Cogdell's *Popular Eugenics*.

31. See Stephen Fender's chapter, where he connects eugenics rhetoric and ideology with the "life histories" collected by Works Progress Administration (WPA) writers. Richard Robinson's film revisits WPA photographer Rothstein's assignment and the implications of his photographs with regard to eugenics. See Author's Note in this essay.

32. These numbers represent a rough estimate based on preliminary research in county courthouse records offices. This archival research is ongoing, and additional people may be added to the list.

33. Indeed, there is evidence that Sherman and Henry's *Hollow Folk* adhered to eugenics ideology. Sizer's "Tabulations" documents use the terminology of the eugenics movement. See Fender's chapter, "Poor Whites and the Federal Writers Project."

34. See Paula Rabinowitz's "Voyeurism and Class Consciousness," a critique of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men*, where she discusses the voyeuristic implications of the narratives and photographs.

35. See Rothstein's book.

36. Hesford and Wendy Kozol also say in their introduction to *Just Advocacy?* that "[t]his dialogic process [of witnessing] is also a transnational and transcultural process whereby reading or seeing human rights violations locates the viewer, the reader, and the witness within local and global communities. Pedagogically speaking, we might ask whether or how representations prompt self-reflexivity about the politics of viewers' historical, cultural, and social locations?" (11).

37. As Hesford suggests, testimony should recognize "the ongoing state of and need for the call to action—a continual empathetic unsettlement predicated upon the inherent incompleteness of the present and the ungovernability of the past" ("Documenting Violations" 130). Hesford warns, as do many post- and third-world feminists, that "[i]n reliving the trauma, in the name of giving evidence, the witness and the viewer, perhaps unavoidably, are implicated in recreating the spectacle of trauma" (122). Creators of the various genres of testimony risk reappropriating the stories of the dispossessed. This "*crisis of witnessing* [refers] to the risks of representing trauma and violence, ruptures in identification, and the impossibility of empathetic merging between witness and testifier, listener and speaker. A critical approach to the *crisis*

of witnessing as it pertains to the representation of human rights violations therefore prompts us to question the presuppositions of both legal and dramatic realism that urge rhetors (advocates) to stand in for the 'other' on the grounds that such identifications risk incorporation of the 'other' within the self" (107).

38. Black makes the case that the eugenics movement in Virginia and the United States does indeed constitute genocide under the UN's definition.

39. See also Hesford's *Spectacular Rhetorics*, Peter Nyers's *Rethinking Refugees*, and Krupnick's *Displacement*.

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