

Racial Suspicion's Paper Performances

From a distance, the floating figures of artist Wendy Maruyama's *Tag Project* look like fantastical creatures (Figure 0.1).¹ Gently illuminated, they might be spirits covered in peeling, copper-tinged bark, or giants wearing sumptuous fringed coats. As I draw closer, however, the feeling of wonder begins to turn into something else, something more akin to horror. The delicate appearance of the figures from afar belies the dense tangles of string and paper that compose them. The effect is chaotic, even suffocating. Leaning in, I can make out the text on the papers: a name, an identification number, and a camp (Figure 0.2). Each figure, I realize, represents one of the ten camps in which Japanese Americans were incarcerated amidst fears after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor in 1941 that they threatened the security of the United States.

For the *Tag Project*, Maruyama replicated the tens of thousands of tags worn by Japanese Americans when they were forced to "evacuate," as the process was euphemistically called, from the West Coast of the United States. Among the most striking images to emerge from this moment are photographs by Dorothea Lange that depict the elderly, children, and families wearing these tags (Figure 0.3). Lange's attentiveness to these subjects and the objects that suggest their ordinary life—their snacks, hats, and bags—more starkly sets off the awkward slips of paper that attest to their sudden transformation into standardized, transportable units.

Unlike these images, Maruyama's *Tag Project* does not attempt to humanize, or to render innocent and ordinary, those who were forcibly removed. Rather than ask Japanese Americans to perform—yet again, their loyalty,



FIGURE 0.1. Wendy Maruyama, *Tag Project*. Courtesy of Wendy Maruyama. Photograph by Kevin Miyazaki.



FIGURE 0.2. Wendy Maruyama, *Tag Project*, detail. Courtesy of Wendy Maruyama. Photograph by Kevin Miyazaki.



FIGURE 0.3. Dorothea Lange, Photograph of two children awaiting evacuation, 1942. Records of the War Relocation Authority, Series: Central Photographic File of the War Relocation Authority.

their assimilation, and their guilelessness—Maruyama has the paper tags themselves perform a complex commemoration of the camps. Seen in detail, the knot of tags evokes the crowding of people into horse stalls and trains and barracks, the impossibility of privacy, and the conflicts that developed among those incarcerated in the camps. Seen from a distance, however, the tags do not seem frustratingly entangled so much as reassembled into a convening of otherworldly bodies. A part of the paper trail here becomes still, no longer restlessly documenting and tracking, but simply holding history as the uncanny making of people into paper, and paper into people.

In Maruyama's *Tag Project*, the same papers that served as vehicles for administering a "suspect" population become the means for critique and recollection. Importantly, these effects emerge from the complicated relationships that Maruyama generates among the texture of the tags, the text on them, and the position and the response of the viewer; or, in other words, from the

interactions among materiality, textuality, and embodiment. These interactions, richly captured by Maruyama, are the subject of this study.

Paper Performance: Suspicion and Asian American Archives explores the relationship between the documents used to manage racial suspicions and the performances that suspicion compels. In particular, it traces how suspicion propagates both theatricality and documentation, and how theatricality and documentation together generate opportunities to trouble, counter, and redistribute suspicion, as well as to affirm and expand it.

Across the twentieth century, various U.S. government agencies have developed bureaucratic procedures to assess people of Asian descent as “legal” or “illegal,” “loyal” or “disloyal,” “friend” or “enemy.” These procedures have been shaped by the emergence of new technologies and administrative modes of identification and examination, as well as by public pressure, military strategy, diplomatic considerations, and legal and political challenges instigated by those under suspicion. The enduring image of the unfathomable “Oriental” with a masklike face makes those identified as Asian both obvious and terrible targets for suspicion: obvious because they seem to be hiding something, and terrible because that something seems to resist efforts at detection.² Further stereotyped as skillful imitators, people of Asian descent are cast as proficient actors, but, as Sianne Ngai notes, not as excessively animated ones—a designation borne by other racialized groups.³ Instead, the distinctly *affectless* acting underscored by Asian racialization aligns with associations of Asians with mass, rote behavior rather than with creativity and interiority. Thus, conceptions of an impenetrable Asian “mask” do not simply reflect anxieties about being able to read the other; they also manifest a fear that there might be nothing behind the mask to read. Yet the project of uncovering or accessing this dubious interiority has been mandated as a national priority at numerous historical moments. When perceptions of Asians as indistinguishable and inscrutable have collided with these demands, elaborate choreographies of paper and performance have been developed to discern the truth of individuals within groups seen as generally suspect. These procedures have given institutional authority and form to suspicion while rarely alleviating or containing it: while insisting that there was *something* to uncover, they have offered less the satisfaction of suspicion than its expansion.

The close relationship between paper and suspicion is clear in ubiquitous state documents like identity cards, questionnaires, interrogation transcripts, and intelligence files that have been used to assess people for passage, exclusion, and incarceration. Yet however vital paper has been to these processes, the work of evaluating individuals and managing groups has also relied extensively on performances, or embodied presentations before others. Especially when it comes to suspicion, which in institutional form relies heavily on paper to record and manage evidence, performance is often set next to and apart from paper, as what might provide a necessary supplement when paper hits a limit. For example, when documents are deemed insufficient for satisfying suspicion, live examinations by officials provide an alternate site for extracting evidence. But the reverse equally applies, with an array of documents serving as a necessary supplement to performances compelled from those deemed suspicious. Suspicion's powerful drive to know thus readily traverses paper and performance in search of a definitive, and elusive, truth.

In this restless endeavor, however, an epistemic gap emerges between these sites, a point of aporia that materializes in the incongruence between what is documented and what is embodied. On the one hand, this gap can become the very grounds for further extending control and surveillance; on the other hand, this gap can also provide a means to frustrate suspicion's aspirations toward certainty and facilitate attempts by those under suspicion to resist or elude investigation and persecution. These efforts might include creative and unexpected interactions *with* papers that seek to diminish, counter, or co-opt their force, including manipulations of the material forms through which they circulate. These material forms, which I keep in mind by centering paper rather than text in this study, are fundamental to the authority and the efficacy of documents, but also expose them to failures and appropriations beyond those of a purely linguistic variety. Paper's materiality troubles the separation of text from embodiment, cultivating certain physical interactions as proper modes of use while also leaving open the possibility of all kinds of *misuse*, both accidental and purposeful.⁴

Throughout this study, I use the term *paper performance* to describe these complex relationships, with *paper* bridging text and materiality, and *performance* connecting efficacy and theatricality. In modifying "performance," "paper" narrows the scope of performances considered, while with "performance" as the anchor noun, "paper performance" highlights paper's dynamism and force, as well as the various ways that one might perform with

paper. Thus, although the papers of state archives constitute the primary objects of study, questions of performance—the performances captured, enacted, and projected by papers, the performances compelled, hindered, and made possible by them—drive my analysis. This focus on performance also inflects and orients my approach to *paperwork*, which, especially in its associations with the bureaucratic and emphasis on embodied interactions with paper, covers similar ground. Nevertheless, along with affirming the importance of performance theory to this study, “paper performance” better foregrounds how bureaucratic activities, despite their reputation for being tedious and prosaic, can evoke practices associated with theater, such as role-playing, scripting, staging, and spectatorship—especially in contexts of racialized state suspicion. A performance framework makes it more difficult to ignore how the vigilant eyes of the state watch over these scenes of paper shuffling. “Paper performance” also more directly invokes the history of the Chinese American “paper families” that formed during the period of Chinese immigration exclusions: this history was the initial inspiration for this project and deeply informs how I theorize the interface between the documentary and the theatrical.

Identifying paper performances, however, means applying a critical frame that blurs the line between object and method. Although all methods direct attention to favored objects, the concept of paper performance assumes a particularly tight link between *what* and *how*. Namely, paper performances become discernible as such by employing a *dramaturgical* approach, one that entails not just applying a dramatic frame to social interactions or language, as proposed by Erving Goffman or Kenneth Burke, but also reading papers dramatically—that is, in their intimate relationship with performance.⁵ This model draws from an understanding of dramaturgical work as a practice of mediating between paper and performance, such that literary and historical considerations are always set in relation to embodied presentations and interactions. In addition to centering the dynamic between paper and performance, such an approach, I argue, enables engagements with state documents that, rather than perpetuating the suspicions that they record, manage, and circulate, sets suspicion within scenes that, however formulaically plotted, unfold as both intricately assembled and necessarily fluid encounters.

Although I have thus far emphasized the theatrical and dramatic dimensions of paper performances, I see these throughout the book as dynamically linked to performance understood as “doing” and “effecting.” This flexible

conception of performance reflects both the influence of theories of performativity and a recognition that racialization works by muddling the lines between theatrical and nontheatrical embodiments. One of the early interventions of performance studies was to decenter theater and drama by attending to other performance practices, including rituals, festivals, and everyday interactions. The concept of performativity further extended performance's compass, especially as it developed from J. L. Austin's initial reflections on language that performs (does or effects something) into a paradigm for conceiving of gender as reiterative or citational through the work of Judith Butler. In addition, the growing prominence of performance in critical studies of race has made clear that a plastic understanding of performance—as embodied, everyday repetitions, as well as theatrical presentations, as doing as well as displaying—better accounts for its complex relationship to racialization. Saidiya Hartman thus offers “performing blackness” as a term that “conveys both the cross-purposes and the circulation of various modes of performance and performativity that concern the production of social meaning and subjectivity.”⁶ Long histories of turning racialized bodies into objects of scrutiny and spectacle, and of essentializing inscrutability, duplicity, and theatricality, exemplify how racialization works by drawing lines between performing as doing and performing as showing, or between “natural” and “affected” performances.⁷ In their study of racial melancholia and racial dissociation, David Eng and Shinhee Han apply a flexible notion of performance to define race: “[Race is] a continuous modulating *relation* between object and subject, a coexisting and coextensive formation, a dynamic movement of sociality and causality. In describing race as a relation, as a process rather than a thing, we treat it more as a verb than a noun. For us, race is a performance rather than an essence.”⁸ Even as performance, in its various forms, has been a key modality by which racial essentialism has asserted its credibility, thinking of race *as* a performance illuminates how it continuously materializes between bodies, or between bodies and things, and insists that we do not have a race but collectively produce it.

Broadly conceived, the term *paper performance* could describe a variety of phenomena as well as approaches to their study; my focus here on state administration and racial suspicion is not meant to limit these possibilities. The choice to center cases drawn from Asian American history might also seem arbitrary to the extent that what I describe as the paper performances of racial suspicion span centuries and proliferate globally. Nevertheless, the

examples that I take up in the first part of the book—Chinese immigration exclusion, U.S. colonization of the Philippines, and the incarceration of Japanese Americans—are not only key moments in Asian American historiography; they also mark a convergence of developments that crucially informed the modern management of “suspect” populations by the U.S. state: the expansion of American political, military, and economic power into the Pacific region, an increase in immigration from that same region, and the growth of American bureaucracies. U.S. administration in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries of Asian bodies, which seemed to pose threats to both nation and empire, initiated procedures of documentation that have had enduring and widespread effects. Furthermore, this legacy is not merely a matter of historical coincidence, but rather reflects the specific ways that U.S. law has continuously distorted itself to justify excluding, colonizing, and incarcerating Asians, a dynamic captured by Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson’s concept of “racial exception,” Teemu Ruskola’s characterization of the “legal despotism” of U.S. immigration laws, and Karen Shimakawa’s theory of the “national abjection” of Asian Americanness.⁹

By making paper performances central to the study of Asian American racialization, however, I also seek to expand our understanding of the forms of creative engagements and refusals available to those who are subjected to both relentless documentation and demands to perform—whether as racial caricatures, lawful immigrants, or loyal Americans. Paper has constituted a mode of regulation that authorizes racial suspicions and perpetuates racial exclusion, yet it has also enabled performances that have facilitated transnational passage, unsettled state administration and surveillance, and troubled the logic of racial and national classifications. This interplay between paper and performance has been the necessary condition of Asian America’s emergence from the theaters of racial suspicion.

Suspicion’s theatricality

With modernity, suspicion cast off an unseemly reputation to become respectable, even authoritative. Yet if suspicion promises a mode of seeking meaning and knowledge that is simultaneously rigorous and flexible, creative and circumspect, it is also far too restless to stay satisfied. It seeks containment only to spread relentlessly, pursues certainty only to cast doubt on its possibility, and demarcates suspects only to produce more.

The modern institutionalization of suspicion involves both suspicion's permeation of institutional cultures and practices, and the development of bureaucratic procedures for managing persons deemed suspect. Although my primary concern is the latter, the processes developed to assess and regulate suspect bodies are inextricably linked to the broader procedures of modern institutions and their attendant assumptions about how information and knowledge are generated, verified, and applied. In coining the phrase "the hermeneutics of suspicion" to describe the critical shift inspired by the works of Sigmund Freud, Karl Marx, and Friedrich Nietzsche, Paul Ricoeur encouraged an association between modernity and suspicion that others in the humanities have since extended to a range of domains. Rita Felski thus argues that suspicion has become deeply "embedded in a variety of institutional structures, tacit conventions, and local norms" since the nineteenth century, including the reading practices of the academy, and that suspicious interpretation has become an "institutionally mandated attitude, rather than the expression of a buried psychological impulse or an abnormally mistrustful mind."¹⁰ Elisabeth Strowick likewise argues that suspicion is "a disposition characteristic of modernity"; she elaborates that modernity "gives rise to various forms of suspicion, to modern forms of resentment and practices of disciplining oneself (*the suspicion of oneself*) as well as an epistemology of suspicion."¹¹

While less sweeping in its sense of suspicion's impact, a 2014 review of social scientific research on suspicion saw in these studies a case for the value of suspicious thinking and its further institutional propagation.¹² In a report distributed by the U.S. Air Force Research Laboratory, the authors found that studies commonly identified "uncertainty," "increased cognitive processing," and "perceptions of (mal)intent" as important characteristics of suspicion.¹³ The articles surveyed describe suspicion as a "dynamic state" of "suspended judgment"¹⁴ that hovers between trusting and distrusting someone or something.¹⁵ While noting that suspicion casts its objects in a negative light,¹⁶ they suggest that suspicion might usefully counter the "correspondence bias," or the tendency to attribute behaviors to a person's disposition as opposed to their circumstances.¹⁷ One of the studies cited muses that when it comes to persons indelibly "marked by some stigma," "suspicion, rather than [their] behavior, may engulf a perceiver's field,"¹⁸ but this phenomenon appears only as a slight qualification to its overall argument. Following the conclusion of these studies that suspicion encourages complex or creative thinking,¹⁹

the report speculates on the benefits of “suspicion training” in informational technology and military contexts.²⁰

The definition of suspicion presented by this report echoes, in many respects, British psychology scholar Alexander Shand’s reflections on suspicion from a century ago: “Poised in doubt, it is not rushed prematurely into action. Divided between contrary impulses, it is forced to reflect on the advantages of each.”²¹ Yet while Shand similarly proposes that suspicion might be cognitively productive (he specifically reflects on the potential biological value of suspicion, its usefulness in preparing us for action), he diverges from this literature on suspicion at a crucial point. Namely, his understanding of suspicion is more strongly informed by the negative stance that it takes toward its object: “For these doubts [of suspicion] are not equally balanced between the opposite alternatives, but incline always to adopt the worse rather than the better conception of his character . . . There is something in the nature of this emotion that inclines us to imagine evil without good cause, and sustains the evil thought as fear sustains the thought of danger.”²² Shand stresses that while suspicion may be a state of uncertainty and indecisiveness, it is exceptionally obdurate in its view of its object as threatening, duplicitous, and malevolent. In other words, uncertainty dabbles with something like belief or conviction: suspicion may be a suspended state, but it is also powerfully inclined in a particular direction.

The emphasis that Shand places on suspicion’s propensity to perceive more evil than good, duplicity than sincerity, accords with his sense of suspicion as an emotion. While studies of suspicion that highlight its possible social usefulness tend to stress its cognitive aspects, those, like Shand’s essay, that offer more warning than praise tend to accentuate its emotional or affective qualities. Thus, the social scientific studies mentioned above characterize suspicion as a state or a process and contemplate its benefits for cognitive activity.²³ By contrast, in her appraisal of suspicious scholarly critique, Felski, who also draws from Shand’s essay, contends that the hermeneutics of suspicion is “not just a cognitive exercise but an orientation infused with a *mélange* of affective and characterological components.”²⁴ Felski accordingly invites scholars to question established critical tendencies by considering the affective qualities of suspicion, those that may unwittingly shape their approach to literary analysis. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick’s influential work on paranoid and reparative readings, albeit more explicitly concerned with suspicion’s close

cousin, similarly questions the dominance of the hermeneutics of suspicion by reflecting on paranoia's limitations as a "theory of negative affects."²⁵

For the purposes of this project, I refer to suspicion as a *feeling*, with the caveat that I am ultimately less interested in placing suspicion in a particular category than in exploring how and to what effect suspicion moves *between* conceptual categories. I nevertheless find *feeling* the most appropriate term to hold suspicion for several reasons. *Feeling* can act, of course, as a synonym for suspicion, when describing a vague thought, sensation, or perception. Flexibly spanning noun and verb, it can take on an object (feelings *about* something) while allowing for ambiguity about external and internal causes: the claim to "feel something" can suggest both expression (I feel something inside that I wish to share) and impression (I feel something external affecting me). As I will elaborate below, this ambiguity is essential to suspicion, which remains undecided about its origins: is the one under suspicion actually duplicitous and unreliable, or is their ill intent merely imagined by the one who suspects? Finally, feeling gestures toward affect, emotion, and cognition without being identical to them. Theories of affect have insisted that it cannot be conflated with feeling or emotion. Teresa Brennan, for example, describes feelings "as sensations that have found the right match in words,"²⁶ which is not the case for affect. Brian Massumi urges a comparable distinction between emotion and affect. Although further differentiations might be made between emotion and feeling (for example, feeling might draw closer to the cognitive), the critical point is that while emotions or feelings, in these frameworks, are attached to subjects and language, affect refers to "intensities" of uncertain identification and significance.²⁷

Reflecting on this issue, Sianne Ngai proposes that we might see these distinctions in terms of *degrees* of difference: "affects are *less* formed and structured than emotions, but not lacking form or structure altogether; *less* 'sociolinguistically fixed,' but by no means code-free or meaningless."²⁸ I find this turn to gradations especially useful for theorizing suspicion not because it establishes a scale on which to position suspicion, but because it helps illuminate suspicion's tendency to move across this scale. More precisely, suspicion strives to move from the unformed to the informed, from unarticulated affect to defined emotion, and from "subjective" emotion to "objective" knowledge. Furthermore, the interactions among and the transitions between what might be called suspicion's affective, emotional, and epistemic dimensions

are critical to its operations and impact. In suspicion, epistemic uncertainty intersects with the persistence of a negative affective response to the object of suspicion. The consequence of suspicion's uncertainty, according to Shand, is that "as the emotion starts from doubt and ignorance, its end is knowledge—knowledge of the man's intention toward ourselves or others."²⁹ I would add that in seeking to move from doubt to knowledge, suspicion concurrently attempts to negate its "ugly feelings" by locating evil definitively *in* the one suspected.³⁰ If what initially seems to be subjective, emotionally motivated conjecture is able to assume the status of objective truth, not only would such a shift relieve the exasperating doubt that plagues suspicion, the one who suspects could also claim that their suspicions always derived from the other's actual ill will, and not from their own dubious sense of animosity toward the other.

To suggest that suspicion seeks to disavow its affective dimensions is not to suggest, however, that suspicion always *begins* as affect. The credit that this aspect of suspicion—that vague sense of something not quite right that circulates between bodies—receives for sparking the drive to know may or may not be deserved, but set at the origins of suspicion, it provides a convenient defense should knowledge of the other's duplicity and ill will continue to prove elusive. Linking one's suspicions to an undefined affective response ensures that a lack of proof is never devastating. Suspicion might want to become knowledge, but it can also sustain continued, furtive observation as a faint inkling.

Suspicion in this model is thus an intentional feeling, one with an object and a target. Paranoia, by contrast, is simultaneously more diffuse and more intense than suspicion: the threat seems more pressing, but less identifiable. Yet even with a clearly defined object, suspicion perversely confounds the very distinctions between subject and object that the former would maintain. According to D. A. Miller, the slippage between subject and object that occurs "whenever judgment is attempted" (judging others tends to bring judgment upon ourselves) is more likely when judgment "has devolved into mere suspicion."³¹ In his reading of Wilkie Collins's *The Woman in White*, Miller describes a situation that captures the particular contagiousness of suspicion: "The novel abounds with suspicious characters, in the telling ambiguity of the phrase, for what [the characters] all suspect is that *they are themselves suspected*. . . . They are suspected, moreover, precisely *for being suspicious*."³² In this scenario, suspicion perpetuates itself in multiple directions—it even

becomes its own target as characters direct their suspicion at the suspicion of others—and reverberates among all caught in its circulation. The *Oxford English Dictionary*'s definition of suspicion includes the instructive note that “[i]n early use [it was] often qualified by evil, wicked, false.”³³ Whatever evil or falseness suspicion casts on its object, the same qualities threaten to taint its subject. The one who suspects can offer no fully convincing defense of their misgivings, but the one under suspicion is shadowed by the possibility, however slight, that such misgivings are justified.

Suspicion's tendency to blur distinctions as it spreads is evident as well in its *theatricality*. I purposely assume here a narrow definition of theatricality centered on the intentional playing of (false or illusory) roles, an understanding that has historically made theater itself suspicious. Suspicion's theatricality therefore refers both to the theatricality generated by suspicion and to the kinds of theatricality deemed suspicious.³⁴ Suspicion engenders “theatrical” relationships insofar as it casts the suspect as a likely actor while compelling the one who suspects to take the position of an engaged spectator. It effects, moreover, a “doubling” of its object, fragmenting the one under suspicion between who they are and who they appear to be—in the eyes of the suspecting party, as well as in their own eyes if they are aware of (or suspect) the other's feelings. (Given long-standing antitheatrical anxieties about the transgressions and unstable boundaries of the stage, the uncertainty that surrounds whether the one under suspicion is actually “playing a role” adds to, rather than detracts from, the theatrical analogy.)³⁵ Faced with this indeterminacy, those who are suspicious of others enact what Shand describes as suspicion's “tendencies of watchfulness and secrecy,”³⁶ observing *surreptitiously* in order to catch their targets as soon as the mask slips. Securing this covert position, however, can require its own set of performances—of, for example, guilelessness and disinterest. Sedgwick's observations on paranoia and suspicion are apt here: “It [paranoia] sets a thief (and, if necessary, becomes one) to catch a thief; it mobilizes guile against suspicion, suspicion against guile; ‘it takes one to know one’”; she thus describes paranoia as “reflexive and mimetic,” drawing in part on D. A. Miller's work.³⁷ (While her essay often blurs the line between suspicion and paranoia, I tend to associate these features with suspicion, with paranoia dispersing them onto a larger, more obscure system.) Alfred Hitchcock's 1941 film *Suspicion* illustrates this dynamic in its depiction of a woman who, fearing that her husband is plotting to kill her, plays the unsuspecting wife in order to discover his intentions.

Closer to the interests of this book, Monica Kim's study of the interrogation of prisoners of war during the Korean War describes a lecture from a U.S. Naval Reserve officer on "Some Aspects of Interrogation of Oriental POWs" that, in detailing how to elicit information from the interrogation subject, was "primarily about how to read and hide intent," or, in other words, how to see through a performance and to put one on.³⁸

As long as knowledge of whether the one under suspicion is "playing a part" in order to hide their intentions remains elusive, the line between what is imaginary and what is not, what is staged and what is not, and *who* is playing a role and who is not remains difficult to draw. Yet this ambiguous condition, generated by suspicion, is also what suspicion simultaneously works to control. Through its efforts to position subject and object in a controlled and stable spectatorial relationship, suspicion endeavors to manage its unstable theatricality, a theatricality that quickly spreads even as it rests on an unverifiable attribution of role-playing. Suspicion might thus be considered a feeling in search of structure. In her reflections on the hermeneutics of suspicion, Felski describes its phenomenological orientation to the literary text as a mix of intimacy and detachment, a practice of "engaging in close—yet also critical and therefore distanced—reading."³⁹ The suspicious stance that she outlines involves both turning toward the object of suspicion, thus keeping it under scrutiny, while maintaining a distance in perspective and position. Although Felski's primary concern is critical reading practices, the relationship that she traces of measured distance and intimacy might describe, more generally, the formal structure to which suspicion continuously aspires, one that combines close physical presence and continuous visual access to its object with efforts to guard a sense of anonymity and detachment. This structure might be compared not only to scholarly critique but also to certain kinds of spectatorial experiences, such as those afforded by the proscenium stage or new surveillance tools such as closed-circuit television, where a sense of both proximity and distance can be maintained.

This more critical sketch of suspicion—with its emphasis on negative affects and contradictory effects—sets it firmly against the optimistic portrayals of suspicion suggested by studies that emphasize its potential cognitive value. Nevertheless, my intention is not to disregard those facets of suspicion that seem to hold epistemic promise. Insofar as suspicion remains undecided, it does not foreclose the possibility of surprise, reversal, and even dissipation, and it is specifically this suspended state that these studies embrace

for its apparent effects on cognitive activity. Even if suspicion tends strongly toward negative assessments, what conditions might enter the space of suspicion and trouble its drive to find duplicity and guilt, perhaps carving a different path (or many different paths), or altering assumptions about what would constitute satisfying truth or knowledge? Although this question will percolate through the chapters that follow, two concerns guide this initial outline of suspicion: that imprecise delineations of suspicion might confuse it with related but not identical modes such as skepticism and a more neutral or leisurely ambivalence or uncertainty, and that efforts to trigger or intensify suspicion because of its potential cognitive benefits might overlook or underestimate its tendency to be associated more readily with some bodies than with others.

Because this book is specifically concerned with racial suspicions, it attends precisely to those whose persistent social stigmatization complicates more positive assessments of suspicion.⁴⁰ While suspicion circulates widely, in varied contexts, and with institutional authority, its efficacy, directionality, and distribution are hardly uniform. While the suspicious readings of some, especially those designated as experts and professionals, circulate freely as objective, critical assessments, the suspicious readings of others can trigger accusations of hysteria and paranoia; thus, stereotypes of emotional women and overly sensitive people of color, as well as Freud's paranoid homosexual, deprive them of the privileges of a "detached" and edifying suspicion. Furthermore, not only does suspicion sit more easily with some subjects than others; it also attaches more frequently and aggressively to some targets—such as the supposedly inscrutable Asian—than to others. Or, as Sara Ahmed might put it, suspicion tends to stick to certain bodies, while also sticking different groups of bodies together.⁴¹ Suspicion has thus concentrated at particular sites like the border, the slum, the ghetto, the camp, the prison, and the colony, even while infusing the assumptions and workings of a broad range of modern institutions. Forming distinct patterns as it circulates and collects, suspicion sparks different processes of investigation and containment that reflect beliefs about the nature of the target's suspiciousness. The more suspicion gathers around certain bodies, the more it seems inherent to those bodies, and—in a vicious cycle—the more a body seems inherently suspicious, the more likely it is to attract further suspicion.

Those forced to carry suspicion on their bodies are not exceptions to the general workings and possibilities of suspicion, but its most intimate and

abiding targets, and as such, they occupy not the edges of suspicion's energies but its very crux. I would nonetheless be remiss to consider racially marked bodies solely as *objects* of suspicion, both because, as described above, suspicion tends to ricochet, and because, as argued in subsequent chapters, suspicion might well be the most appropriate and productive feeling to illuminate forms of oppression, discrimination, and coercion. Yet even when suspicion is mutual, its force and effect vary depending on the parties involved, especially in contexts of unevenly distributed authority and power, and racialized notions of security and threat, as well as proper behavior and affect.

In an interview about her 2008 novel, *A Person of Interest*, writer Susan Choi observed, "Innocence as we understand it in our [American] culture is very theatrical. The flip side is if you're charming enough, you can get away with anything."⁴² Choi's protagonist, an Asian American mathematics professor named Lee who decidedly lacks charm, comes to understand the repercussions of not performing innocence when he becomes a suspect in the bombing murder of a colleague. While an unexpected outburst of anger about the incident garners the sympathy of those who believe he is distressed by the death, his later inability to demonstrate proper emotions renders him suspicious. By claiming that innocence, rather than guilt, is theatrical, Choi questions the assumption that only those who are guilty must put on an act, whether for newspaper cameras or agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation; both innocent and guilty alike, when under suspicion, enter a theatrical encounter. Innocence must be displayed and performed, even as the effectiveness of that performance depends on obscuring its theatricality. Although professions of innocence ostensibly point inward (to the truth they claim to disclose), what is "inside" can only be gauged from external signs and expressions that are legible to those positioned as audience and judge.

Legibility, however, becomes a problem when the face itself seems to resist assessment, when an apparent screen of inscrutability materializes at the site of interaction to ascribe both affectation and affectlessness to the one under suspicion. This racialized subject/suspect embodies theatricality as persistent artifice (a skillful imitation, if never fully unconvincing), but never theatricality as art, that is, as the creative expression of one's interiority.⁴³ As readings of the novel have noted, it leaves unclear to what extent Lee's apparent suspiciousness derives from racial stereotypes—for example, of Asian inscrutability, deceptiveness, or callousness toward life.⁴⁴ This ambiguity, however, helps extend to the reader the troubling doubts that circulate in the novel

not just about the identity of the killer, but also about how race and racism manifest in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries.

Although the basic premise of Choi's novel was inspired by her discovery that her father had attended graduate school with Ted Kaczynski, the so-called Unabomber, its story of a middle-aged Asian American professional who is falsely accused of threatening public security also called to mind the struggles of Wen Ho Lee, the Taiwanese American scientist charged with espionage in 1999.⁴⁵ For many of those who organized to protest this case, it seemed to exemplify persistent suspicions of Asian American duplicity, of divided loyalties and surreptitious infiltrations. As this book traces, these suspicions have had expansive consequences, including exclusionary immigration policies, the imprisonment and torture of colonial "insurgents," mass detention, surveillance, and the recruitment of informants, all of which have shaped how various people of Asian descent have encountered and interacted with the United States as border, nation, and empire.

Given this history, the wealth of research in Asian American studies on topics such as betrayal, impersonation, inscrutability, intelligence, and treachery should not be surprising.⁴⁶ Many of these works notably do not reject the stereotype of duplicity by affirming Asian American innocence: instead, rather than accepting dichotomous conceptions of good and bad, inside and outside, friend and enemy, loyal and disloyal, they open up larger questions about subject formation and epistemology, and the possibilities for knowing, creating, and being together differently. Feminist critiques by Leslie Bow and Lan Duong, for example, stress the multiple accusations of betrayal and treachery leveled on women of color and explore how artists creatively and collectively navigate competing demands for loyalty.⁴⁷ Tina Chen and Crystal Parikh, respectively, reframe impersonation and betrayal, seeing them not as acts that prove duplicity, but instead theorizing how they illuminate the conditions of possibility for Asian American and minoritarian subject formation.⁴⁸

Suspicion, while previously attracting less critical attention than betrayal, receives more elaboration in recent studies by Vivian Huang and Sunny Xiang on inscrutability as minoritarian performance and Cold War intelligence, respectively. In particular, these studies offer insights into the epistemic implications of suspicion: to be suspicious of someone who is racialized as inscrutable, they suggest, is to confront more keenly the limits of what one knows. Observing that the "unknowability of what is behind the speaking

surface, of what cannot be found from an outside has occasioned deep anxiety and suspicion of Asian others throughout the modern age,” Huang locates critical potential in this illegibility.⁴⁹ The uncertainty that haunts racial suspicion might drive an expansive and persistent hunt for evidence, but it also, according to Huang, manifests an epistemic limit that can offer an opening for queer minoritarian performances of inscrutability. For Xiang, the figure of the inscrutable “Oriental” epitomized the intersection of “racial thinking” with the “suspicious thinking” of the Cold War and exacerbated the sense that “deeper meaning lies beyond the surface deception of masks, covers, and veils.”⁵⁰ The result was a massive Cold War archive where “even the most dubious evidence came to be fashioned into actionable intelligence.”⁵¹

These accounts set Asian inscrutability at the point where suspicion is both most intense and most impotent. Racial suspicion is driven to seek what might be behind or beyond the (inscrutable) surface, only to confront the persistent elusiveness of knowability or intelligibility; instead, this limit becomes productive of paper (the Cold War archive) and performance (by queer minoritarian artists). In theorizing the paper performances of racial suspicion, then, I ask how the production of paper by a suspicious state intersects with the performances that it compels, whether mandated responses, creative engagements, or their uncertain amalgamation. As I elaborate in the next section, although divergent interests once directed attention away from this intersection, a growing number of studies from multiple fields are exploring the relationship between documents and practices, archives and repertoires, papers and performances.

When paper and performance meet

Proliferating as an essential part of modern bureaucracies, paper has become a vital, but not always reliable, constituent in the state management of suspicion. In suspicion’s drive to know, paper serves as both an essential collaborator and a point of frustration. It offers a technology for controlling suspicion’s more unstable tendencies (its theatricality, its contagiousness) by facilitating and validating inquiry. Yet paper’s limitations also compel suspicion to look elsewhere for satisfaction: at other papers, at other forms of documentation, and at live examinations and interactions. Paper’s conflicted relationship with suspicion is symptomatic not only of the difficulty of containing suspicion, but also of paper’s fundamentally contradictory character:

it is both fragile and enduring, trivial and powerful. It gathers and circulates around us, hardly noticed until it suddenly exerts its force (a court summons, an indecipherable manuscript, a purloined letter).

Bureaucratic documents exemplify the authority of what Bruno Latour calls *inscriptions*, "objects which have the properties of being *mobile* but also *immutable*, *presentable*, *readable* and *combinable* with one another."⁵² Latour mulls the question of how "immutable mobiles," which might take the form of maps, diagrams, or office records, have come to have "greater credence, in case of doubt, than anything else: common sense, the senses other than vision, political authority, tradition, and even the Scriptures," and how something as fragile as paper has come to enable those who shuffle it to dominate over others.⁵³ Latour's point, however, is not that bureaucrats exercise their power by doing things to or with paper, but that inscriptions themselves do things when they form files of files "arrayed in cascade": they make possible Weberian rationalization, for example, and enable "paper shuffling" to become "the source of essential power."⁵⁴ He thus avers, "The 'rationalization' granted to bureaucracy since Hegel and Weber has been attributed by mistake to the 'mind' of (Prussian) bureaucrats. It is all in the files themselves."⁵⁵

In another influential account of the force of documents, Michel Foucault asks how those inscribed on paper (such as those who enter the penal system) are subjected by it, that is, made subjects by submitting to its power. Foucault's analysis has thus inspired studies of documents that focus on their production of subjects, or, as Marie-Andrée Jacob puts it, on "form-made persons," rather than on the representation or self-representation of subjects via paper.⁵⁶ Foucault describes documentation as a critical component of disciplinary societies, especially in its close relationship to the examination as a key disciplinary mechanism: "The examination that places individuals in a field of surveillance also situates them in a network of writing; it engages them in a whole mass of documents that capture and fix them."⁵⁷ Characteristics of disciplinary writing include "the accumulation of documents, their seriation, the organization of comparative fields making it possible to classify, to form categories, to determine averages, to fix norms."⁵⁸ The proliferation, collection, and management of documents is integral to the production of normalizing knowledge and the exercise of disciplinary power. At the crux of this activity is the criminal whose body and behavior are rigorously scrutinized and assessed, and around whom expansive systems of surveillance develop in the name of controlling delinquency.⁵⁹

As numerous studies of files and documents emphasize paper's capacity to generate reality, the saying "Quod non est in actis non est in mundo" ("What is not in the records is not in the world") becomes a refrain.⁶⁰ Yet assumptions about the dominance of the record have also been complicated as research on documents, paperwork, and archives has flourished in the last few decades across a range of fields, including history, anthropology, literary studies, media studies, science and technology studies, and archival studies.⁶¹ This work has made clear that the specific effects generated by papers are neither consistent nor entirely predictable. For example, to the extent that the power of documents is not wholly dependent on the context of their production, the very characteristics that make them seem so reliable (for example, their apparent durability and objectivity) also render them potentially treacherous. Paper's constancy is inseparable from its fickleness. Or, as Matthew Hull argues, the ostensibly "decontextualized" character of bureaucratic writing enables "radical recontextualizations."⁶² This lesson became clear, for example, in the Nuremberg trials, when the very documents that fed the infamous bureaucracy of the Nazi regime served instead as prime evidence of its crimes.⁶³

Even as documents inscribe bodies (and experiences and objects), bodies respond to and engage with papers in proper and improper ways. Ben Kafka observes in his study of paperwork in postrevolutionary France that the common experience of the vexations of paperwork reflects a shift from arbitrary exercises of power to a simultaneously disciplinary *and* disciplined state, one in which everyone is accountable for doing the right paperwork, and everyone can be held accountable by paper.⁶⁴ Yet while proposing that the "investigation of the psychic life of paperwork must be able to account for how this medium makes everyone, no matter how powerful they may be in reality, feel so powerless," Kafka also stresses the unpredictability of documents and their limitations; papers may do many things, but they also continuously *fail* to do things.⁶⁵ Thus, the French clerk Charles-Hippolyte Labussière, who in 1794 allegedly saved actors of the Comédie-Française from the guillotine by destroying government files, is one of the primary characters in Kafka's study. On the one hand, the material qualities of the document (its portability, its durability) are crucial to the inscription's power; on the other hand, the same material qualities make it especially vulnerable to manipulation, destruction, misuse, and even—as parodies of the Labussière story suggested—digestion.⁶⁶

If the force of inscriptions has fundamentally transformed how and what people know and believe, it has also generated productive tensions and gaps between the document and the documented. Although the papers that Labussière purportedly destroyed claimed to be the truth of the condemned actors, the difference between paper and performer enabled one's erasure to save the other. In circumstances where damning documents are not destroyed, this difference still makes it possible to question the document's accuracy and thus to undermine its authority. At the same time, even as the fissure between paper and what it purports to inscribe enables these evasions of the document's authority, this gap also serves as the impetus for sustaining and expanding control, surveillance, and exclusion.⁶⁷ Since documents can be forged, lost, sold, and otherwise used in unauthorized ways, they offer only limited comfort to those who would *contain* suspicion through them, but offer unlimited potential for *extending* suspicion. For example, when "suspect" groups are forced to carry identity cards, not only does the distribution of such documents enable persistent, arbitrary requests to show one's papers, but their potential unreliability also justifies the continued scrutiny and investigation of those documents, and their bearers. For those who are persistently documented, scrutinized, and questioned as potential threats, paper can offer unremitting frustrations and the occasional reprieve.

Latour acknowledges that the domination of inscriptions "is not a given, but a slow construction and it can be corroded, interrupted or destroyed if the records, files and figures are immobilized, made more mutable, less readable, less combinable or unclear when displayed."⁶⁸ In other words, even if efficacy is located in files rather than bureaucrats, they nonetheless have effect through practices of moving, reading, combining, and displaying documents. Latour moreover recognizes that a certain amount of theater is involved in the production of scientific knowledge, which depends on the "*staging* of a scenography in which attention is focused on one set of dramatized inscriptions" (emphasis in original).⁶⁹ While dramatization might simply be a matter of focusing attention, of setting inscriptions in the right light and frame, it also introduces the possibility of staging inscriptions to different effects.

This turn to theater and performance in studies of paper is not unique to Latour and becomes more palpable as studies of documents, files, and papers increasingly turn their focus to questions of practice, materiality, affect, and form.⁷⁰ A close relationship between text and performance can be a matter of

historical and cultural practice: thus, Farhat Hasan's study of early modern India stresses that "textual practices were actually intricately braided with performative traditions and cultures of orality," such that they "dynamically interacted with each other in shaping meaning and interpretation."⁷¹ Other studies have invoked performance and theater as models for illuminating the sense of "presence" conveyed by continuously updated files; the performative nature of documents and the "sensuous experience" of texts; the "phantasmic" and "mimicked" quality of documents used by an unrecognized state; and the "readerly subjectivities" of blank forms.⁷² Yet despite the recurrent appearance of analogies to theater, performance usually appears in these studies of documents and files without reference to the field that centers its theorization and research.

Performance studies, for its part, has long espoused a commitment to nontextual social and cultural practices. Paper and performance respectively fall under what Diana Taylor influentially delineated as the archive and the repertoire.⁷³ In making this distinction, Taylor bolstered performance studies' argument for unsettling the primacy of the former, including texts and documents, and for elevating other, embodied forms of knowledge and memory. While acknowledging that "textocentrism—not texts—is the problem" and encouraging the reconfiguration of "texts and performances in horizontal, metonymic tension,"⁷⁴ Dwight Conquergood offered this important critique:

Only middle-class academics could blithely assume that all the world is a text because reading and writing are central to their everyday lives and occupational security. For many people throughout the world, however, particularly subaltern groups, texts are often inaccessible, or threatening, charged with the regulatory powers of the state. More often than not, subordinate people experience texts and the bureaucracy of literacy as instruments of control and displacement, e.g., green cards, passports, arrest warrants, deportation orders.⁷⁵

One path from this argument leads to the conviction, articulated by Conquergood, that the "hegemony of textualism needs to be exposed and undermined."⁷⁶ Methodologically, this conviction spurs a turn away from text toward performance. Influential early works of performance studies took up this charge by elevating considerations of liveness, embodiment, and ephemerality; expanding our understanding of how cultural memory is transmitted beyond text and archive; and shifting notions of what constitutes proper

objects of academic inquiry.⁷⁷ Nevertheless, Conquergood's observation that for many, "textualism" is experienced as obstacle and burden also prompts a consideration of how such subjects navigate its impositions. For example, how have those under suspicion as "illegal" immigrants, colonial subversives, or foreign agents grappled with papers deployed as extensions of "the regulatory power of the state"?

Throughout this book, I contend that answering this question requires attending to the interface between paper and performance. With arguments for the critical intervention afforded by performance studies now more firmly established, and given the turn to performance evident in various studies of paper, files, and documents, I offer the concept of paper performance as one articulation of a relationship between performance and text, or repertoire and archive, that sets them "in tandem," as Taylor proposes, and "in tension," as Conquergood suggests.⁷⁸ Centering the dynamic between papers and "paper shuffling," between bureaucratic files and the habits of bureaucrats, and between documents and those subject to documentation, I show how limits and failures, as well as possibilities for the expansion of power, emerge in these interactions.

While performance as it pertains to bureaucratic papers might seem to be a matter of execution (filling out a form to begin a process) and examination (filling out a form to meet a standard), a more theatrical sense of performance also surfaces as subjects grapple with their doubling on paper. To the extent that encounters with the bureaucratic state involve assessments of papers and bodies, and the relationship between them, questions of presentation and representation, reading and feeling, and authenticity and impersonation proliferate. The stakes of these questions, and the theatricality of these encounters, intensify when suspicion, and racial suspicion in particular, becomes the dominant feeling of state administration, when the slippage between paper and performance inherent to documentation comes under its special scrutiny.

Archives of racial suspicion

While the assimilation of a suspicious epistemic approach into a range of institutional contexts and the concomitant expansion of the production, collection, and organization of documents formed the general conditions for the Asian American paper performances explored in this book, the extension of

U.S. power into the Pacific and migration across this region more specifically concentrated suspicion and paper on Asian bodies. As David Palumbo-Liu observes, “The very shape and character of the United States in the twentieth century—specifically, in the imaginings of modern American development in the global system—is inseparable from historical occasions of real contact between and interpenetrations of Asia and America, in and across the Pacific Ocean.”⁷⁹ Among its many consequences, these Pacific engagements brought populations regarded as potential threats to nation and empire within the purview of the state.⁸⁰ Because of various political and economic interests and pressures, the complete exclusion of people of Asian descent from the nation or from colonial governance was not possible; instead, systems of surveillance, documentation, and examination, materialized through papers and bodies, were established to manage racial suspicions.

In her study of the *Book of Negroes*, which in 1783 cataloged the various physical traits of Black loyalists who were transported to Canada, and freedom, by the British, Simone Browne points to the intersection of paper identification and racialized border control at the very dawn of the United States. Excavating the deep entwinements of surveillance and blackness, she concludes, “The tracking of blackness, rooted in the violence of slavery, was instituted through printed text.”⁸¹ The *Book of Negroes* foreshadows the elaborate processes of documentation that would develop to regulate borders and manage “suspect” bodies with the expansion of both modern bureaucracies and criminology in the nineteenth century.⁸² Simon Cole notes that the identification technologies that thus emerged were aimed at “not just criminal suspects, but also a wide range of people considered ‘suspect’ and alien for other reasons: the natives of Europe’s colonies; recent immigrants; people of color; poor, mobile ‘vagrants’; ‘degenerates’; and prostitutes.”⁸³ The use of fingerprints for identification purposes, for example, was tested in the British colonies and considered for regulating Chinese immigration to the United States before it became more widely adopted by law enforcement. Identification via fingerprints seemed appealing in these cases because of the common perception that it was difficult to distinguish among South Asians, in the British colonial context, and among the Chinese, in the U.S. immigration context.⁸⁴ Although U.S. officials ultimately did not adopt fingerprinting as a tool for implementing Chinese exclusion, they did for a time use the Bertillon system in which minute measurements were made of different parts of the body and recorded in a standardized form.⁸⁵ The system’s association

with the identification of criminals and the humiliation endured by those who had their bodies intimately examined prompted protests, and it was eventually abandoned. Officials continued to rely, however, on photographs and inspectors' notes on physical features when processing Chinese applicants for entry and reentry.

Written descriptions, photographs, fingerprints, and physical measurements all promised to reduce unruly bodies to words, images, and numbers that might provide durable identifications across time and space. The copious production of papers meant to manage various "suspect" peoples, however, extends well beyond identification documents to interrogation transcripts, surveillance cards, questionnaires, and informant reports. Observing the vast "racial and imperial infrastructure" generated by paper to support expanding U.S. power in the twentieth century, Anjali Nath argues that paper is the "basic unit of a surveillant, archiving, war-making police state."⁸⁶

Generated to exclude Chinese immigrants, suppress Filipino revolutionaries, segregate Japanese Americans, and curb progressive political movements, the archives that I examine are very much a part of this "racial and imperial infrastructure" and offer a dubious source of knowledge about individuals and groups under suspicion. Scholars have pointed to the ethical and epistemological problems posed by archives when it comes to those who have been enslaved, colonized, and persecuted—those who appear in the archives primarily as property or as populations to control, monitor, and exclude, and whose presence in the archives further contributes to their erasure and exploitation.⁸⁷ Thus, to offer one especially powerful example, Saidiya Hartman wrestles with how to tell the story of Venus, or the figure of the enslaved woman, given what is both absent (names, lives, love) and excessive (violence, degradation) in the archive. Proposing a history "written with and against the archive," Hartman suggests a practice of "critical fabulation," which would involve both "straining against the limits of the archive to write a cultural history of the captive, and . . . enacting the impossibility of representing the lives of the captives precisely through the process of narration."⁸⁸ Critical fabulation allows for the possibility of ethically engaging with an archive that offers limitless accounts of violations, but little about the actual experiences and subjectivities of those enslaved.

The archives examined in this study, however, present a problem of excess more than lack. Anjali Arondekar's observation that the colonial archive is "most empty precisely when it is most full" makes for a cogent description of

the archives of state suspicion, where points of excessive accumulation manifest an intractable lack of certainty, or the (inscrutable) limits of knowability emphasized by Huang.⁸⁹ From colonial and domestic surveillance to border control to mass detention, state processes of excluding and administering people of Asian descent have generated a surplus of documentation covering the minutest of details about these subjects. These comprehensive, standardized systems of identifying and evaluating individuals were keenly concerned to discover (or at least claim to discover) the truth about these subjects—who they were, where their allegiances stood, whether they were a threat to U.S. security—by accounting for their families, friends, social memberships, occupations, and hobbies, as well as their physical appearance, their bodily postures, and the general sense of character that they seemed to convey. Given this surfeit and the availability, in some cases, of other sources such as oral histories and family archives, these bureaucratic papers do not demand as urgently for narratives that might evoke what has been rendered absent.⁹⁰ Instead, the critical challenge that they present is how to read and write against their drive toward uncovering a singular truth about their subjects, or how to read and write against suspicion's relentless pursuit of certainty. The objective of developing such an approach would not be to generate a sense of life beyond documentation, which is better pursued through other methods, but instead to trace how those under suspicion have suffered documentation's burdens and found within it means for circumventing, challenging, and enduring state scrutiny, exclusion, and incarceration.

The dramaturgical approach taken up in the following chapters builds on methods of interacting with archives that draw from practices of reading literary and cultural texts. Observing, for example, that colonial archives “conjure what the colonial bureaucracy did not and could not know—its equivocation, ignorance, and incoherence—even as it performed the agency of an imperial will to know,” Lisa Lowe shows how the contradictory character of these archives emerges in “discrepant tone(s),” “insistent repetitions,” and “rhetorical anomalies.”⁹¹ Applying literary modes of reading to an archive meant to be read differently (as evidence and records) becomes a means of generating insights on archive and empire, rather than those subjected to its documentation. The dramaturgical approach that I develop similarly dwells on details that might seem gratuitous to suspicion's pursuit of evidence and instead articulate its limits and excesses. Textual elements, however, are continuously set in relation to embodied, material interactions, or to the larger

scenes of performance through which paper circulates. Although proposing that we approach suspicious state archives through the lens of theatricality, dramatization, and performance carries the risk of affirming racial suspicions by seeming to assert the duplicity or disingenuousness of those examined, my intention here is to encompass the entire scene of state documentation and interrogation within this lens, rather than direct it at specific individuals, and thus to decouple questions of authenticity and reliability from the subjects of state suspicion. Such an approach extends methods developed in performance studies that, for example, call attention to the range of elements, such as script, setting, and enactment, that come together to make up the “scenario” or the “mise-en-scène” of performance—ideas advanced by Diana Taylor and Michelle Castañeda, respectively.⁹² Rather than asking, again, if those under suspicion were who they claimed to be, if they felt what they claimed to feel, I contend that suspicion inevitably renders these scenes theatrical and that the circulation of bureaucratic processes between documents and live examinations compels those involved to see their interface, what I describe as paper performances, as a key site of struggle. Those under state suspicion thus find ways to intervene—albeit, in limited and ambivalent ways—in their own documentation.

My attention to bureaucratic interactions and documents throughout is meant to complement existing work in critical race theory, ethnic studies, and performance studies that has investigated the intersections of race, law, and performance. The relationship between legal enactments and Asian Americanist cultural production, for example, has been richly explored by Joshua Takano Chambers-Letson, David Eng, Lisa Lowe, and Karen Shimakawa, among others. In studies of immigration law and performance, Castañeda’s recent work on the waiting rooms, courtrooms, and prisons through which asylum seekers circulate powerfully captures the force of theatricality in these spaces.⁹³ The archives and the performances that I examine are inextricably tied to the law, whether as responses to legislative and judicial directives, or as alternatives to or evasions of their mandates. Furthermore, in dwelling on the racial suspicions that have shaped state administration, the study follows critical race theory’s attention to, as Kimberlé Crenshaw puts it, “continuing patterns of racial power in presumptively race neutral institutions.”⁹⁴ Ultimately, however, the law forms a constitutive background in the chapters that follow, with administrative practices rather than formal legal proceedings serving as the primary focus. This configuration reflects, in part, the scenes that I have

chosen to highlight, namely, encounters with immigration officials on Angel Island, colonial military intelligence in the Philippines, War Relocation Authority employees in World War II camps, and agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation, rather than with lawyers and judges. (The general absence of legal representatives in these spaces indeed supports arguments about racial exception and legal despotism forwarded by Chambers-Letson and Ruskola, respectively.) While questions of the law, rights, and constitutionality loom over these spaces, I am most interested in how state power is enacted, mediated, and contested through bureaucratic administration, and how state suspicions are managed in intimate convergences of people and paper. Each of the cases in the first four chapters moreover offers a view of bureaucratic procedures in the process of taking more concrete form as officials grappled not only with their suspicions about those under investigation, but also with the potential unreliability of the very procedures meant to alleviate those suspicions. If initially ad hoc in nature, the methods that emerged would have an indelible influence on U.S. practices of immigration regulation, surveillance, and counterintelligence.⁹⁵

In the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the possibility of claiming kinship via paper opened a path to entry into the United States during a period of severe restrictions on Chinese immigration. Since persons of Chinese descent with birthright citizenship could bring their children to the United States, the fabrication of family relationships became a means for securing entry. This practice led to a rapid increase in the amount of paper produced to enforce *and* to evade restrictive immigration laws, from certificates and extensive interrogation transcripts to coaching papers and falsified photographs. By beginning an exploration of Asian American paper performances with Chinese immigration, Chapter 1 risks reiterating a particular version of Asian American historiography, one that now stands alongside other formulations of where and how “Asian America” began. Nevertheless, the history of Chinese American “paper families,” which inspires the title of this book, offers a particularly clear example of how “suspicious” Asian bodies have been asked to perform through, with, and against paper by the U.S. state, and of how efforts to manage racial suspicion via paper performances led to the proliferation of suspicion, paper, and performance.

The next three chapters pay special attention to the blank form and the myriad ways that these documents perform, that is, what they do and what can be done with them, sometimes at odds with their stated function of gath-

ering and standardizing information about colonized and racialized subjects. Chapter 2 focuses on American military intelligence operations in the Philippines as the United States was establishing colonial rule during and after the Philippine-American War. As relations between Filipino revolutionaries and U.S. occupying forces shifted from allyship to conflict, a discourse of false friendship reflected suspicions on both sides. Among the many efforts by the United States to secure its power over the Philippines, the Division of Military Information established an expansive network of surveillance, including through the use of confidential "Descriptive Card of Inhabitants" that recorded information on suspected revolutionaries and civilian sympathizers. This chapter considers what happens when suspicions that the Filipino *amigo* or friend might be an *insurrecto* are mediated through a blank form. However capacious suspicion might be in its pursuit of evidence, the challenges of mass surveillance also call for the transmission of concise, standardized units of information. A tension emerges in these documents between the demand for efficient colonial surveillance and the idiosyncratic, wayward gazes of its agents who in recording the "distinguishing marks" of subjects make palpable their own distinctive styles of scripting colonial scenes. Among the Descriptive Cards, a small set from one station also included, unusually, photographs of their subjects. These images sit uneasily with both the dominant photographic tropes of the Philippines under U.S. rule and the surveillance files in which they are inserted, evoking—without rendering wholly visible—friendly relations that sit just outside the colonial frame.

Extending the study of blank forms, Chapters 3 and 4 turn to the incarceration of Japanese Americans during World War II and the "loyalty questionnaires" used to determine their eligibility to leave the camps. Presumptions of Asian illegibility helped to justify their mass exclusion from the West Coast after Japan's attack on Pearl Harbor. The head of the Western Defense Command, General John L. DeWitt, affirmed stereotypes of the inherent suspiciousness of people of Japanese descent in claiming that, when it came to this group, "no ready means existed for determining the loyal and the disloyal with any degree of safety."⁹⁶ As Elena Tajima Creef elucidates, "In DeWitt's words, the difference between *loyal* and *disloyal* citizens, which was critical for national security, was also unreadable on the inscrutable Japanese American body; hence, mass migration and incarceration was a more viable solution."⁹⁷ Nevertheless, what DeWitt described as an impossible task

was undertaken by various offices in efforts to enlist Japanese Americans into the U.S. military and to release others to approved areas of the country. At the center of these efforts were a set of blank forms, commonly called “loyalty questionnaires,” which prompted confusion and outrage among those incarcerated. Tracing the suspicious reading practices generated by the forms, both among those compelled to complete them and those charged with processing them, Chapter 3 elucidates three modes of interacting with these papers: the careful scrutiny of words by those forced to fill out the questionnaire; the performance of discovery and unsatisfied suspicion in evaluations of the completed forms by the Office of the Provost Marshall General; and the efforts by administrators of the civilian War Relocation Authority to engage Japanese Americans in suspicious readings of their answers. Chapter 4 then shifts attention from the reading practices applied to the forms to the many performances with paper, from emotional speeches to the mimetic enactment of bureaucratic procedures, that played a vital role in the debates that emerged about the loyalty questionnaire, as well as the antitheatrical discourse that proliferated in response to these performances. I thus move in these two chapters from scenes of completing and processing the questionnaires to administrative hearings about answers on them to impassioned speeches and demonstrations for camp publics, tracking how suspicion transformed a blank form into a paper for close reading, mimetic performance, and theatrical presentation.

In highlighting the antitheatrical discourse that emerged in debates about the loyalty questionnaire, I draw from the writings of Japanese American researchers who recorded life in the camps. Their work of documenting kindled suspicions in camp communities where fears of government informants strained relationships. Such fears, born of the frequent and disruptive employment of informants by the state, stretch across every case examined in this book. Chapter 5 sets the Asian American informant at its center in a study of the Federal Bureau of Investigation files on Richard Aoki. Aoki was a much-admired Asian American activist and educator who, according to the FBI, was also a trusted informant for the agency in the 1960s. In 2012, the claim that Aoki had been an FBI informant led to heated debates about its veracity; even with the eventual release of extensive files about his work as an informant, assessments of his allegiance and legacy continued to diverge. My examination of these files does not attempt to take a stand on what seems

an irresolvable question about Aoki's true intentions. Instead, I show how the practices of paperwork, of generating, circulating, and shuffling papers, aligned the everyday doing of activism with that of informing, even as the scenes recounted in the informant's reports helped to prop up the impression of a split between the two—a necessary precaution given paper's unreliable transmissions and uncertain futures. Paperwork thus enabled paper performances that mediated between the divergent roles of activist and informant, and their respective (if potentially overlapping) audiences.

In my most ambitious visions for this project, the chapters of this book constituted half of a study. In one aspirational version, a second part continued into the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, with a special focus on the Cold War and the "Global War on Terror," both times of intense suspicions and demands to make distinctions between Asian "friends" and "enemies."⁹⁸ Case studies might have included, for example, refugee screenings in the wake of the American War in Vietnam and memos from the George W. Bush administration on the torture and abuse of detainees in the early 2000s.⁹⁹ The limited historical scope of the project, however, has become less vexing to me given excellent studies such as Monica Kim's examination of military interrogations during the Korean War and Anjali Nath's work on the "torture memos" and the Freedom of Information Act, which offer rich accounts of the relationship between paper and U.S. empire.¹⁰⁰ In another imagined iteration of this book, it pivoted more sharply to consider how Asian American cultural productions have engaged the intersections of suspicion, paper, and performance. Ultimately, the Epilogue offers but a partial attempt to explore this possibility. It begins by observing that many key works of Asian American literature evince a melancholic attachment to paper, a relationship of continuous, incomplete rejection, that articulates the contradictory possibilities of paper for racialized subjects. A melancholic relationship with paper, however, might more generally be considered a defining formal feature of drama, which continuously circulates between papers (script) and performances (stage). However conventional, these circulations can also generate unexpected opportunities to explore the contradictions of racialization. I conclude by considering one example, showing how Julia Cho's *The Piano Teacher* (2007) moves between paper and performance to explore a tension between the enduring force of racialization, including its production of suspect bodies, and a pervasive refusal to acknowledge its con-

temporary influence. Given that dramatic practices inspire the critical frameworks developed in this study, it seems only appropriate to close by giving them their own serious consideration.

Beginning with the state and ending with the stage, this study joins two very different sites for exploring the paper performances generated by racial suspicions. Insofar as a fraught but necessary relationship to paper has shaped both Asian immigrants and colonial subjects' encounters with the U.S. state *and* Asian American literary and theatrical practices, paper performances span these points as a constitutive force in the political and cultural formation of Asian America.