

Coded as criminal: gang databases, border technologies, and colonial subjectivity

Michael Lechuga, University of New Mexico and
Sergio F. Juárez, Loyola Marymount University

Abstract

Gang databases in the United States (re)produce settler colonial logics by manufacturing and trafficking biometric data sets that lock Black, Indigenous, and Mestizx peoples into criminal subjections. Since the 1980s, tools like gang databases have been implemented by law enforcement agencies to code non-White, urban communities and their movements and behaviours as actions associated with gang-membership, a subjection that is linked to assumptions of criminality. We draw from studies on rhetorical visibility, surveillance studies, and settler colonial studies to assess how non-white communities are dangerously subjugated and subsequently controlled by federal and local law enforcement agents via technologies of visibility. Drawing on a review of the legal and policy discourses around gang databases in the US over the last three decades, this presentation provides an analysis of how the implementation of the technology that once aided local police in making “gang members” in urban spaces is now used by federal law enforcement agencies, like Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE), to make asylum seekers into “gang members” in border spaces and at ports of entry. Finally, the presentation concludes with a discussion of how the practice of datafication manifests as a “strategic whiteness,” a facet of contemporary settler colonial frontier ideological and psychological thought.

Biography

Michael Lechuga is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication and Journalism at the University of New Mexico. He researches and teaches Rhetoric, Migration, Settler Colonial Studies, and Cultural Studies. He explores the ways migrants and migrant communities are subjected in the US by austere migration control structures and attitudes. His most recent book, *Visions of Invasion*, focuses on the role that technology plays in border security mechanisms and the ways alienhood is mapped onto migrant bodies. In addition, Michael is interested in Xicanx Studies, Anti-Colonial Futurism, Surveillance Studies, Affect Studies and Film.

Sergio F. Juárez is Assistant Professor in the Department of Communication at Loyola Marymount University. His scholarship has centered on understanding the social construction of difference (i.e. race, sexuality, gender, class, ability, and more) through communication critical paradigm theories of Chicana, Black, and Queer feminist scholarship. His research interests are currently centered on education contexts, influencing his goals that include the development of new institutional structures by leveraging technology to construct anticolonial inclusive educational practices and structures.