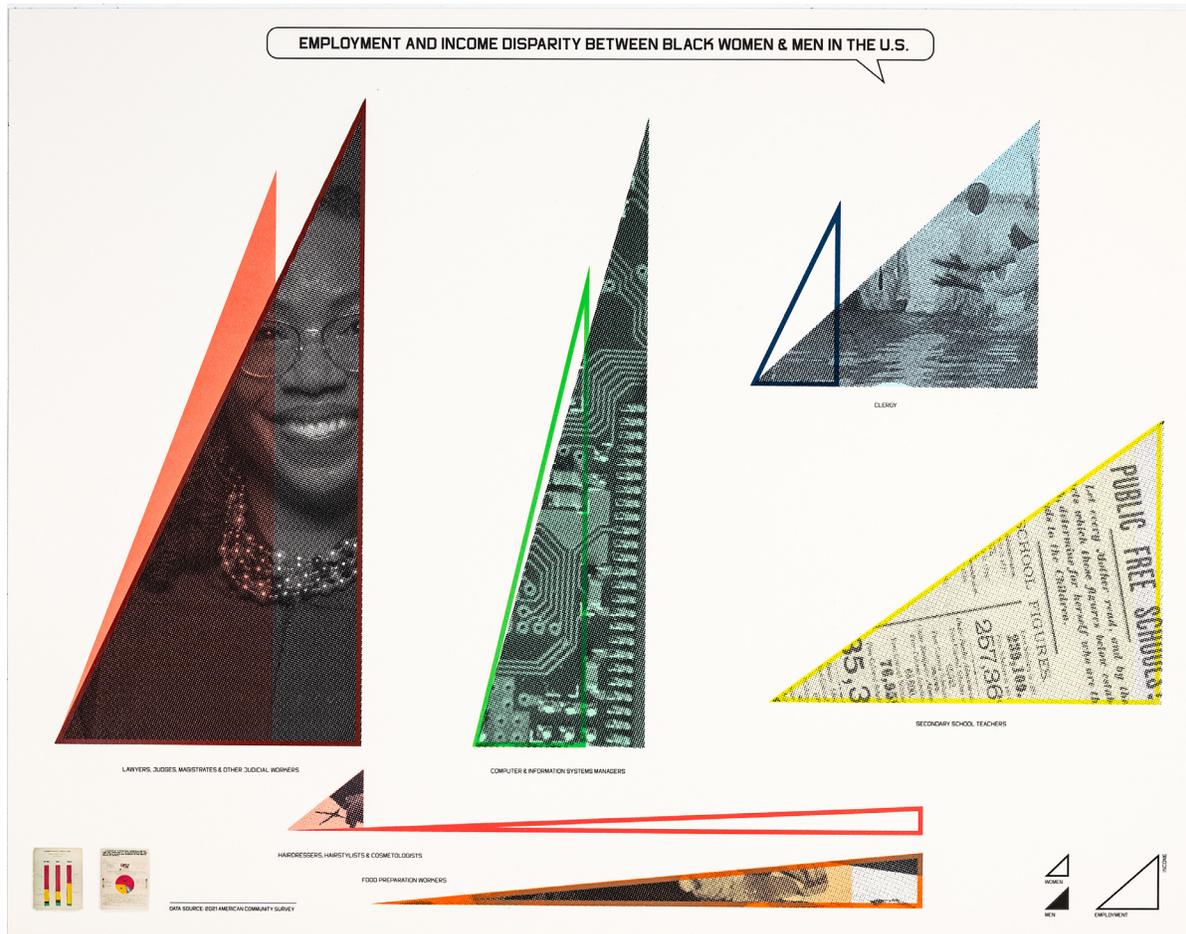


# PROOF

## PRINTING BLACK AMERICA | ISLAND PRESS



Above: William Villalongo and Shraddha Ramani, *Employment and Income Disparity Between Black Women and Men in the U.S.*, 2025. Screenprint, archival pigment print, and collage on Saunders Waterford paper, 22 x 28 inches.

In *EMPLOYMENT*, one of six portfolios in *Printing Black America: Du Bois's Data Portraits in the 21st Century*, artist **William Villalongo** and urbanist **Shraddha Ramani** chart the changing meanings of work in African American life since the nineteenth century. Each portfolio of *Printing Black America* consists of five prints and is introduced with a foreword by historian Nell Irvin Painter and a poem by Langston Hughes. Because the portfolios are printed and published by different print shops in the United States, each one reflects research drawn from each location. *EMPLOYMENT* puts Villalongo and Ramani's ambitions on full display. Their view of Black America telescopes in space from the bird's eye to the hyperlocal, and spans across time from the age of slavery to the present day.

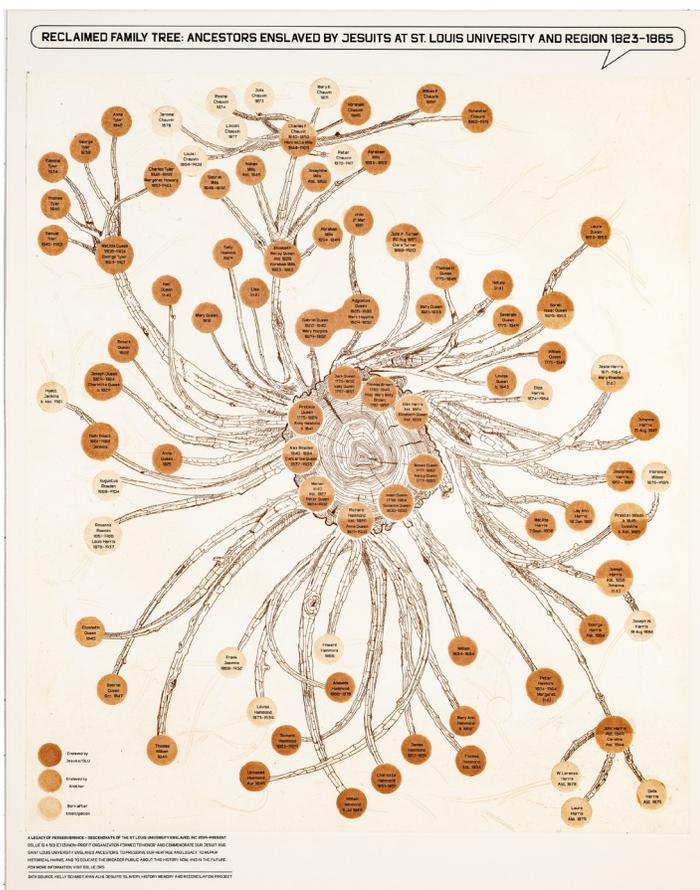
Of the five prints in *EMPLOYMENT*, three are graphic representations of data drawn from current surveys of African American occupations, income and consumer expenditures, and the disparities among men and women across those statistical categories. Two are grounded in St. Louis, where



WILLIAM VILLALONGO AND SHRADDHA RAMANI | ISLAND PRESS

Villalongo and Ramani researched the local history of slavery and racism during their residency at Island Press. *“Sites of Wounding/Sites of Healing” Alternative Atlas: STL* overlays sites of “violent injustice” (in red) and “liberatory memory-work” (in yellow) onto a blackened map of the city. *Reclaimed Family Tree*, a genealogy rendered as a tangled spiral of roots and branches, affirms the ethical and financial debt owed by St. Louis University to the living descendants of its enslaved workers.

Along with the other portfolios in *Printing Black America*, EMPLOYMENT reimagines and extends the infographics produced by W. E. B. Du Bois and his students at Atlanta University for the Exposition Universelle in Paris in 1900. Villalongo and Ramani’s *Occupations of Black Americans, 1900–2021* is a direct continuation of Du Bois’s “Occupation of Georgia Negroes,” which is collaged on the bottom of the print. Whereas Du Bois and his students represented measures of workers in an array of job categories as a hand-drawn bar chart, Villalongo and Ramani represent the subsequent century of Black labor history as a rainbow of colors percolating upward to the present. In Du Bois’s chart, the red bar for “Agricultural Laborers” is so long that it turns backward as it meets the righthand margin; in Villalongo and Ramani’s cascade, farmers and farm laborers turn from blobs of blue to fine lines, giving way to growing columns of professionals, technicians, and clerical workers.



Left: William Villalongo and Shradha Ramani, *Reclaimed Family Tree: Ancestors Enslaved by Jesuits at St. Louis University and Region 1823 - 1865*, 2025. Etching, chine collé, and archival pigment print on Saunders Waterford paper, 28 x 22 inches.

Right: William Villalongo and Shradha Ramani, *Occupations of Black Americans 1900 - 2021*, 2025. Screenprint, archival pigment print, and collage on Saunders Waterford paper, 28 x 22 inches.



*Printing Black America* also continues Du Bois's argument with sociology. Although Du Bois was among the leading sociologists of his day, he was impatient with his white colleagues who ignored his work and misused quantitative data to devalue Black life. Like Du Bois, Villalongo and Ramani use printmaking techniques to draw out the everyday textures and ironies that lay behind statistical data. In *Average Annual Income and Expenditures*, they depict the balance of average income versus consumption with "Thank You For Shopping!" black plastic grocery bags. And while *Employment and Income Disparities Between Black Women & Men in the U.S.* vividly demonstrates the persistence of gendered inequality, the dominating image is that of Supreme Court Justice Ketanji Brown Jackson, among the most powerful people in the country.

Despite its ambitious scope, there is much that *Printing Black America* leaves unrepresented about the histories of political economy and labor activism that have transformed the conditions and categories of Black employment in the United States over the past century. Villalongo and Ramani are nonetheless alive not only to the ironies of those histories but also to what Du Bois called the "Things themselves" that escape quantitative sociological analysis: the rough textures, the jarring rhythms, and the mysterious energies that make the experience of Black life "incalculable."<sup>1</sup>

Essay by Chris Dingwall, Assistant Professor of Design History, Washington University in St. Louis

<sup>1</sup> W.E.B. Du Bois, "Sociology Hesitant" (1905), in *boundary 2* 27.3 (Fall 2000): 37, 39, 40.

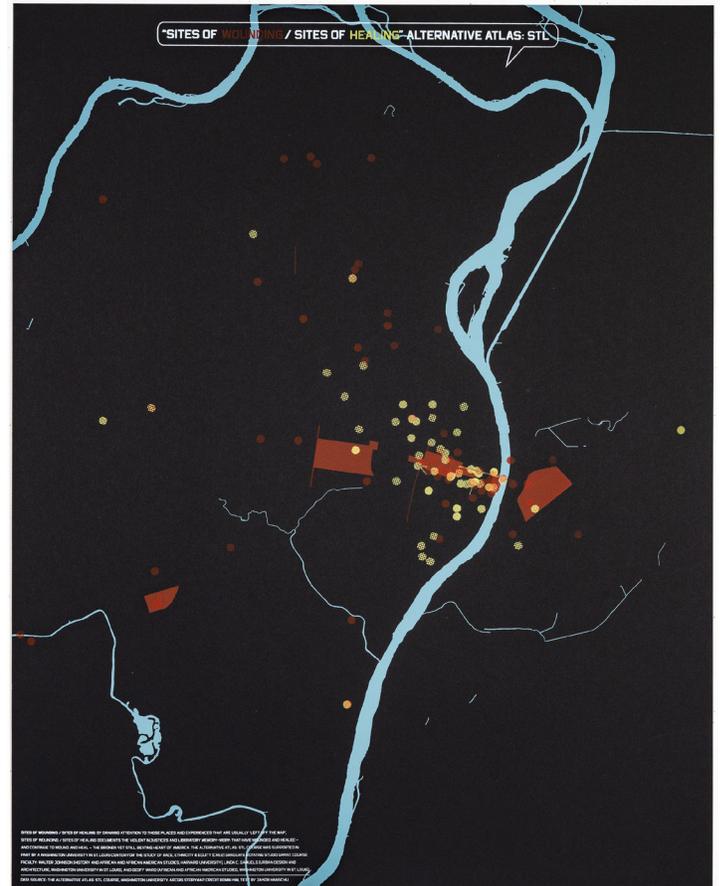


Above: William Villalongo and Shraddha Ramani, *Average Annual Income and Expenditures of Black Families in the U.S.*, 2025. Screenprint, archival pigment print, and collage on Saunders Waterford paper, 22 x 28 inches.

## ABOUT THE ARTISTS:

William Villalongo was born in 1975. He lives and works in Brooklyn, NY. He received his BFA from The Cooper Union School of Art, MFA from Tyler School of Art at Temple University and attended Skowhegan School of Painting & Sculpture. His figurative paintings, works on paper and sculpture are concerned with representing the Black subject against notions of race exploring metaphors of mythology and liberation. His curatorial projects include *American Beauty* at Susan Inglett Gallery in 2013 and *Black Pulp!* touring nationally between 2016-2018 explore the intersections of politics, history and art. Villalongo is the recipient of the prestigious Louis Comfort Tiffany Award and the Joan Mitchell Foundation Painters & Sculptor's Grant. Villalongo was the 2022 Jules Guerin & Harold M. English Rome Prize Fellow in Visual Art. His work is included in several notable collections including the Studio Museum In Harlem, The Whitney Museum of American Art, Princeton University Art Museum and The National Gallery of Art. His work has been reviewed in *Art In America*, *The New Yorker* and the *New York Times*. The artist is represented by Susan Inglett Gallery, New York and is Associate Professor at The Cooper Union School of Art.

Shraddha Ramani is an urbanist and researcher based in Brooklyn, NY. She uses data visualization and mapmaking as tools to make cities more resilient and equitable. Her work is centered around democratizing data to better equip communities to make informed decisions about their futures. She currently works at the NYC Department of Transportation on efforts to improve equity and accessibility. Previously she was Director of the GIS Data Center at New York City Emergency Management, where she led a team to make data-driven decisions for emergency planning, response, recovery, and mitigation. In earlier roles she developed online applications to help the public visualize and understand natural hazard risks in their communities. Earlier, she worked on the development of the *Future City Lab* exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York. Shraddha Ramani is from Bangalore, India and her work is heavily informed by her own immigrant experience. She has participated in planning projects in India and Brazil, and was a Peace Corps volunteer in Ecuador. She has a Master's degree in Urban Planning from Columbia University, and a BA in Environmental Studies from Oberlin College.



Above: William Villalongo and Shraddha Ramani, "Sites of Wounding/Sites of Healing" *Alternative Atlas: STL.*, 2025. Screenprint on Sirio Ultra Black paper, 28 x 22 inches.

**Island Press** is a research-based printmaking workshop and publisher committed to education and innovation in contemporary print editions and artist projects. Visiting artists work side by side with the master printer and students in the Sam Fox School of Design & Visual Arts at Washington University in St. Louis. The result is high-quality print editions of technical complexity created in a unique setting where artists and students share skill sets and ideas.

Island Press is project-driven and collaborative, tapping into the place where the artist's creative research intersects with all of the possibilities of the print studio. Recent artist projects include editions with Radcliffe Bailey, Chakaia Booker, Squeak Carnwath, Willie Cole,

Henrik Drescher, Chris Duncan, Tom Friedman, Ann Hamilton, Trenton Doyle Hancock, David Humphrey, Nina Katchadourian, Shaun O'Dell, Dario Randoletto, Lisa Sanditz, Beverly Semmes, James Siena, Duane Slick, and Paula Wilson.

Island Press was founded in 1978. Past visiting artists include Hung Liu, Jaune Quick-To-See-Smith, Joyce Scott, Juan Sanchez, Nick Cave, and many other great artists.

**DIRECTOR** Lisa Bulawsky | **MASTER PRINTER** Tom Reed

## MORE INFORMATION

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