

Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge

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Namesake (2013)

Qiana Mestrich

[1] The *Namesake* (2013) series is a selection of twenty-five photographs made from mugshots of predominantly Black and Latino women named "Qiana." These women, including myself, were named after a synthetic polymer nylon manufactured in the 1960s by the global chemical company DuPont™.

[2] Founded in 1802, DuPont™ began as a manufacturer of gunpowder. During the American Civil War (1861-1865) DuPont supplied half the gunpowder used by the Union Army. Due to political tensions with Japan in the 1930s, the United States could no longer procure silk, a strong natural fiber coveted for its domestic, industrial and commercial purposes. In the search for an alternative to silk, DuPont™ invented nylon in 1935.

[3] First used in toothbrushes, nylon made its more fashionable debut at the 1939 World's Fair as women's stockings. Introduced in 1968, the Qiana® nylon was a cheaper alternative to silk yet just as luxurious and required no ironing. The fabric was used to manufacture clothing and accessories popular in the disco era, like "butterfly collar" shirts for men and the infamous Diane Von Furstenberg wrap dress. The name Qiana was created by "a computerized combination of random letters" and reached its height as a popular baby girl name in 1978. It continues to be a girl's name used primarily within the African-American community.

[4] In his 1986 essay, "The Body and the Archive," historian, critic and photographer Allan Sekula parallels the emergence of photography in the context of the development of police acts and technologies of surveillance. Sekula's text questions the instrumental use of the camera to identify and control "the criminal body," with the mugshot being its most effective method. Styled to be an objective portrait of the subject under arrest, the photographer is not present in the mugshot. It aims for neutrality. It is standardised, not individual, systematised. It purports to be 'natural,' so that the criminal is exposed in all his evil and malice.

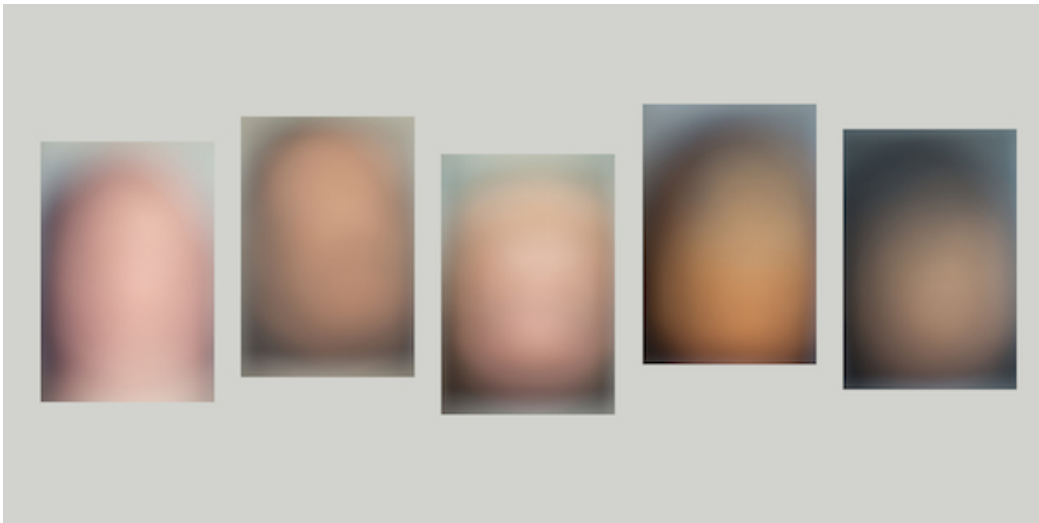
[5] Sekula's essay led me to this "archive" of presumed criminals who were my namesake, discovered one night through a Google Image search. Performing that search multiple times, I gathered over fifty mugshots of women named Qiana. There were other non-incriminating images in the search results, but they failed to hold my attention. In a sea of vapid selfies, the pain emanating from those mugshots overshadowed the smiles of the others.

[6] Although I didn't know them, I felt a kinship with these women as someone who shared their name. As

a photographer, I felt responsible for their representation. The images in the Namesake series were created by (re)photographing web-resolution mugshots sourced online. These "photographs of photographs" were shot at very close range with my camera's aperture wide open. The results are abstracted and nebulous images with "bruised" colors that metaphorically reference violence, like the black and blue marks that appear on a body after it's experienced physical trauma.

[7] These new, blurry photographs invalidate the original mugshots, depriving the archive of its insidious, systematic intention. The *Namesake* series calls attention to symbiotic acts of violence that affect the identity of this peer group including racial profiling, violation of privacy online, corporate influence and consumerism.

Group 1



Qiana B.

b. 1987

kidnap, robbery, gun possession, battery on elderly, currently incarcerated Broward County, FL

Qiana D.

b. 1976

driving suspended license Dekalb County, GA

Qiana H.

b. 1978

failure to report accident Baltimore, MD

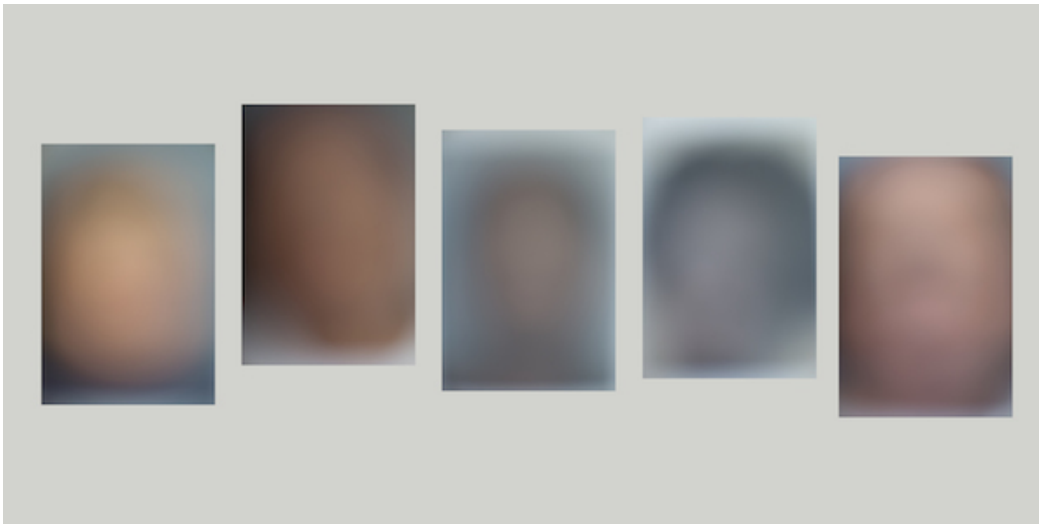
Qiana M.

b. 1977

Unknown
New York, NY

Qiana H.
b. 1974
burning property, maj poss
Charlotte, NC

Group 2



Qiana O.
b. 1964
Unknown
Essex County, NJ

Qiana W.
b. 1979
Shoplifting/retail theft, Fraud Imperson
Seminole County, FL

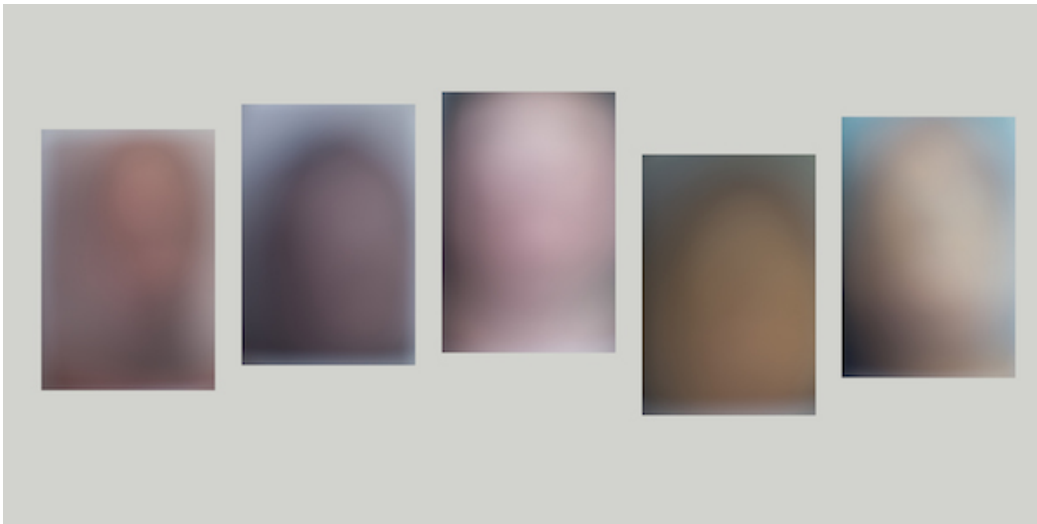
Qiana P.
b. 1976
Cocaine Sale/Manuf/Deliv
Hillsborough County, FL

Qiana A.
b. 1977

Manslaughter 2ND
Tompkins County, NY

Qiana M.
b. 1976
Aggravated Speeding
Tulsa County, OK

Group 3



Qiana H.
b. 1979
720 ILCS 570/402(a)(1)(A)
Cook County, IL

Qiana S.
b. 1978
CIVIL CONTEMPT
Johnson County, KS

Qiana Y.
b. 1973
No Kennel, Cattery Permit
Allen County, IN

Qiana R.
b. 6/26/1976

POSS AMT CON SUB EXCEPT(A)/(D)

Macoupin County, IL

Qiana P.

b. 1978

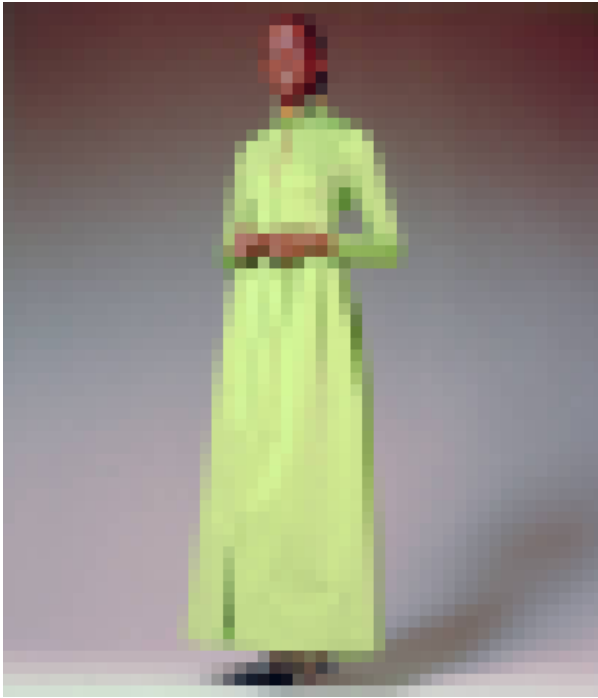
Cruelty to Animals MISD

Dekalb, GA

Additional Images



Untitled 1, The only Black models I found in the Qiana look book (2013)



Untitled 2, The only Black models I found in the Qiana look book (2013)



Illustration of DuPont™ gunpowder can (2013)

Cite this

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