

Refereeing Trump

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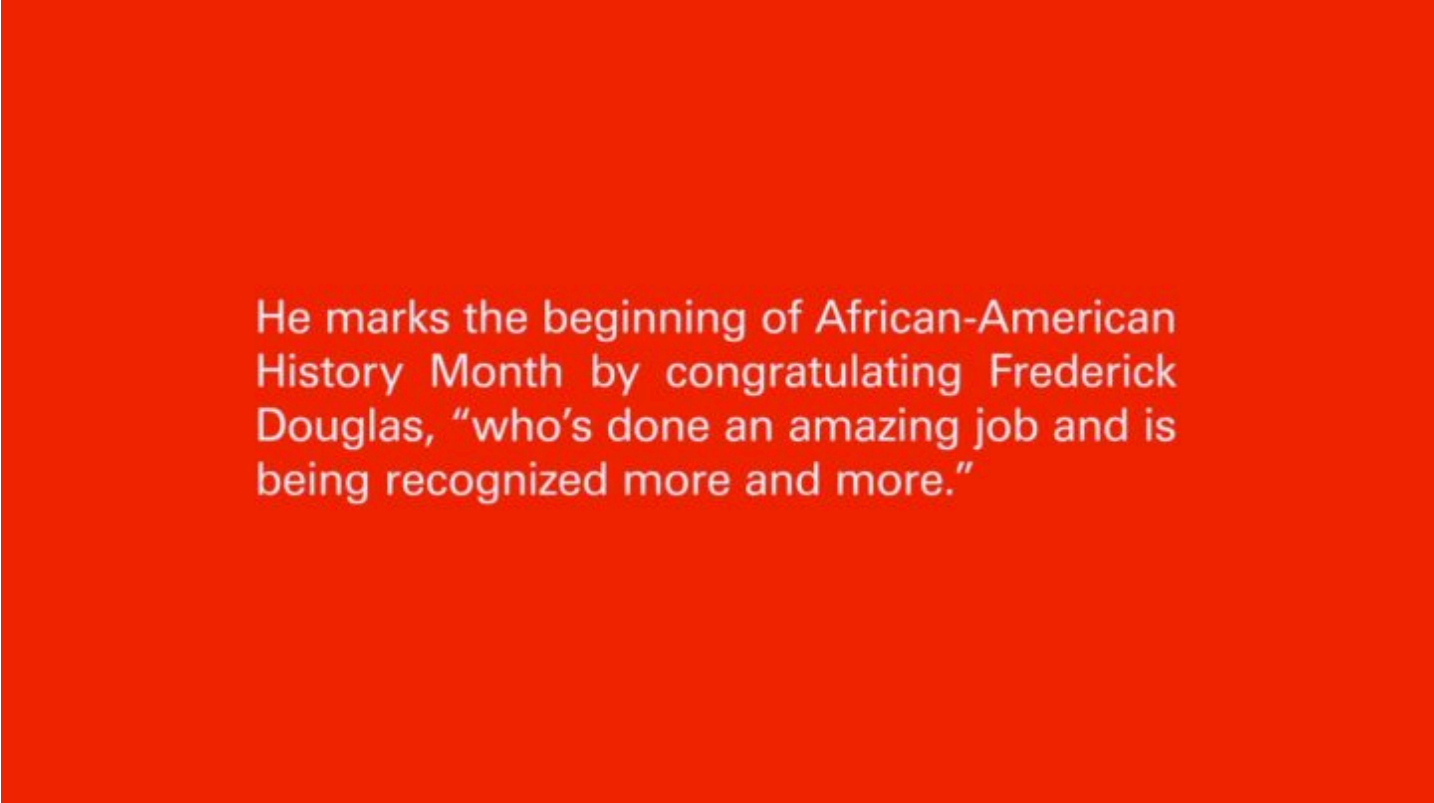
Louis Bury March 17, 2018



Richard Kraft, *All the Yellow and Red Cards issued to Donald Trump from January 20, 2017 to January 19 2018, The Whiteness Issue*, The Racial Imaginary Institute (all images courtesy of the artist)

To mark the one-year anniversary of Donald Trump's inauguration, on January 20, 2018, arts communities nationwide participated in Art Action Day. This day of action was organized by The Federation, an arts group founded by Laurie Anderson, Laura Michalchysyn, and Tanya Selvaratnam in response to Trump's January 2017 immigration ban. It was conceived in contrast, though not opposition, to last year's inauguration day #J20 strike, in which many art institutions and individuals went on strike to protest the incoming administration.

Richard Kraft's multimedia project, *All the Yellow and Red Cards issued to Donald Trump from January 20, 2017 to January 19, 2018* (2018), spans the time frame, as well as the different moods, of these two protests. Kraft has classified Trump's daily actions "in the fashion of a soccer referee," assigning yellow and red cards to the President's conduct since his inauguration. Expanding upon the referee's visual lexicon, Kraft also assigns dark blue cards to members of the administration "as they are fired or resign," as well as light blue cards to "people who have publicly stood up to Trump and/or instigated acts of resistance."



He marks the beginning of African-American History Month by congratulating Frederick Douglas, "who's done an amazing job and is being recognized more and more."

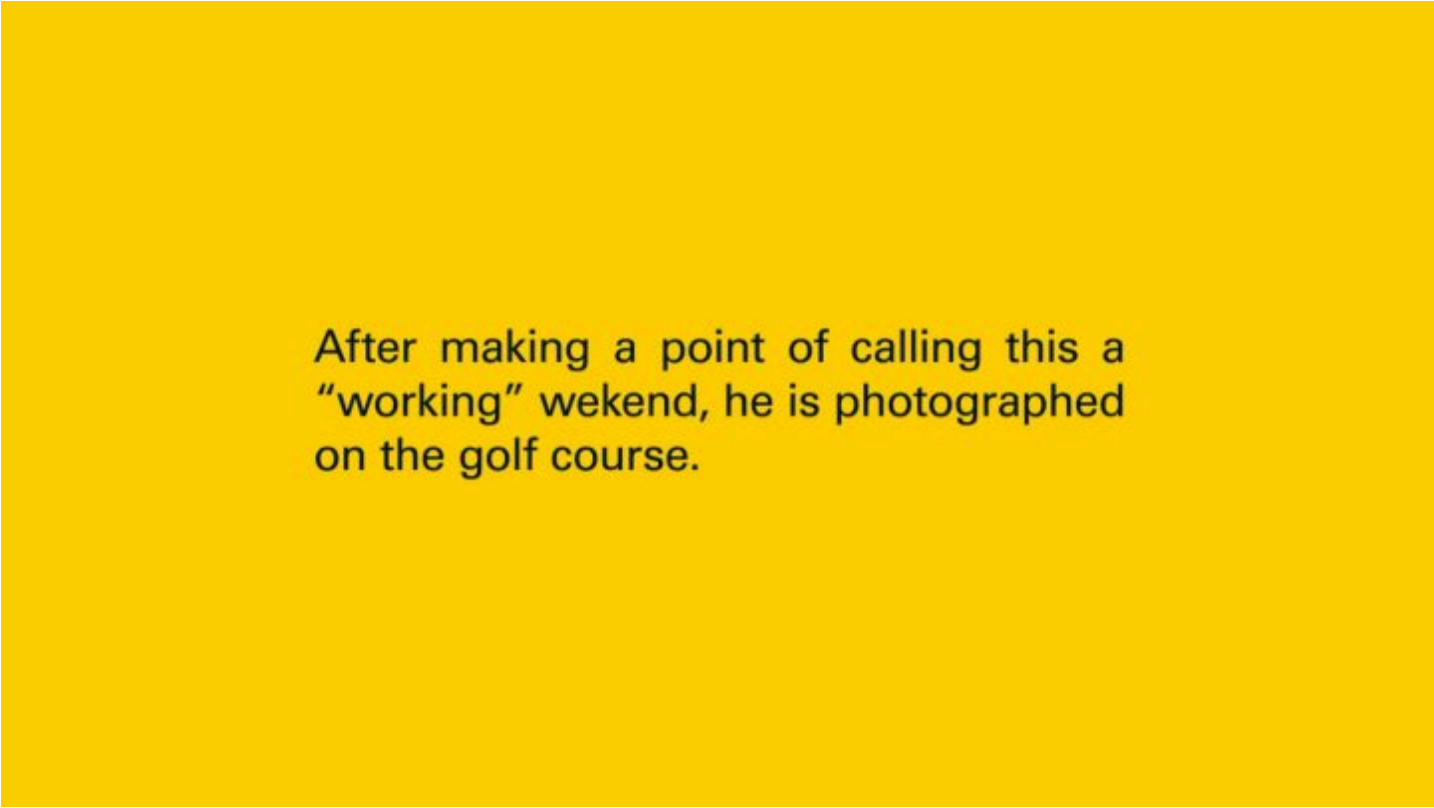
Richard Kraft, *All the Yellow and Red Cards issued to Donald Trump from January 20, 2017 to January 19, 2018*, in *The Whiteness Issue*, The Racial Imaginary Institute

The project takes several forms: a dozen videos, each ten or fifteen minutes long; a series of referee cards painted on 7 x 5-inch wood panels; and a series of drawings that annotate each of the painted cards. Digitally published on January 20, 2018 as part of The Racial Imaginary Institute's *The Whiteness Issue*, the videos are comprised of soundless slides that remain onscreen for about five seconds and catalogue, by date, the President's numerous lies and offenses. Each slide describes a Trumpian misdeed in a sentence or two — for example, "[Trump] fires FBI Director James Comey who is leading the investigation into the Trump campaign's ties to Russia" — and uses as its background the referee card color Kraft has chosen to assign the transgression.

The videos' slow pace, lack of sound, and simple visuals strike a tone distinct from the round-the-clock, full-volume blitz of the news media cycle. Watching *All the Yellow and Red Cards* evokes the dramatic silence in a movie theater as the epilogue to a chilling and all-too-real documentary looms onscreen. Yet, Kraft's referee carding system adds an element of visual editorial to the

onscreen texts; watching the videos also feels like retrospectively scrolling through a social media timeline filtered for headlines and opinions about Trump.

Kraft's judgments about Trump stem from his sense of outrage, but his aesthetic is noticeably more restrained than that of many of his artistic contemporaries. Where some political artworks respond to Trump's invectives in kind — New York street artist Hansky's 2016 "Dump Trump" street mural and Judith Bernstein's recent "Schlong Face" paintings targeting Trump, along with Putin and Kim Jong-Un, are two prominent examples — *All the Yellow and Red Cards* renders its judgments with a referee's impassivity. Occasional examples of snark appear — as in, "[Trump] grins like a complete prick while signing multiple executive orders" — but for the most part the texts strike a matter-of-fact tone and Kraft conveys his judgments by means of his yellow-red-blue visual system.



After making a point of calling this a
"working" weekend, he is photographed
on the golf course.

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As a method for rendering critical judgments, the referee card system is intriguing, but also inexact and unsatisfying. It seems apt that Kraft has chosen to judge a nativist President by using the officiating language of a sport that many natives perceive as foreign. But soccer is uniquely laissez-faire in its collective attitude toward its own rules. The majority of player infractions carry negligible punitive consequence. Even most yellow cards, or "cautions" (a notionally stern warning that the player is getting out of line) amount to little more than a slap on the wrist. Only the red card — an ejection from the game — has significant punitive consequence, but it is shown in soccer sparingly and as a last resort.

In *All the Yellow and Red Cards*, even the red cards don't amount to much in terms of their consequence. Kraft shows Trump enough red to sideline the President for the rest of his playing days, but an analogical carding system has no power to enforce soccer's two-strikes-and-you're-out rule. More than anything, the videos' parade of primary colors highlights the toothlessness of most efforts — symbolic and actual — to referee Trump thus far. It's as if Trump is playing an entirely different game than the one over which pundits, artists, and even lawmakers, imagine they preside. In cataloguing the President's daily conduct this way, Kraft inadvertently confronts Trump's detractors with the frustrating limits to our current powers of political adjudication.

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