More than a century ago, writer and sociologist W.E.B Du Bois was recruited to represent Black Americans on the world stage. He, along with collaborators Thomas J. Calloway and Daniel Murray had put together *The Exhibit of American Negroes* and went to Paris to display their work at the world's fair - the Exposition Universelle of 1900. The aim of the exhibit was to show, in Du Bois' own words, "(a) The history of the American Negro (b) His present condition. (c) His education. (d) His literature." The exhibit included hundreds of books and photographs that illustrate Black life at the time. Alongside them were a set of 58 charts, hand drawn by Du Bois. *Charts and graphs showing the condition of African Americans at the turn of the century* show "the increase of [the] Negro Population, the routes of the African slave-trade, the progress of emancipation, and the decreasing illiteracy." They are bold and colorful, works of art as much as they are sociological documents.

Today, these charts serve as the impetus behind a recent exhibit at Columbia College Chicago's Glass Curtain Gallery. jina valentine's *Exhibit of American Negroes, Revisited*, which opened on September 7th, draws on Du Bois' work, updating his charts using 2020 Census data. The exhibit presents valentine's drawings alongside prints of Du Bois' originals, encouraging visitors to compare and reflect on what has changed – and what hasn't – since then.

The project had been in the works long before pandemic exacerbated much of the country's existing inequalities and has only gotten more relevant. "[The Census] has reverberated into not just being about counting who's doing what, but who's doing the

counting, what people are trying to include and what people are trying to exclude, which is always a part of the census, but it was so clear this year," said Meg Duguid, Director of Exhibitions at Columbia's Department of Exhibitions, Performance, and Student Spaces. "So, it seemed that this work that had been planned and started before 2020 even arrived became more and more urgent and prescient."

valentine's work greets you upon entering, the pieces hanging in black frames on the gallery's stark white walls. The influence of folk and traditional artists on valentine's work is clear, from the meticulous but imperfect handwritten text to the distinct strokes of color, where she uses gouache to recreate the distinct watercolor of Du Bois' originals. Many of the pieces are paired together by the subject of the data they illustrate. First: a map of the United States - the kind you might find in an elementary school classroom - titled "Relative Black population of the states of the United States." in blocky, bold lettering. With cherry red, cobalt, soft pink, deep black, careful grided lines and more, the states are colored in according to the map's key. Next to this map is "Proportion of Black people in the total population of the United States.," which features four increasingly outlines of America, each with a smaller, black America inside of it, shows the titular proportion growing smaller over the years even as the outlines get bigger. These maps are less accurate than the on featured in the previous piece, as if it had been drawn from memory. This piece is the first of many that looks out of time, with the large '2020,' the only thing reminding you that the work and data is contemporary. Amanda Burris, a Columbia student who viewed the exhibit as one of their design classes, said

that the charts were different from standard designs, but still effective. “I really became drawn to the engaging way this sensitive information was expressed,” she said. “As a designer, there is a really kind of structured way we typically think in when we create infographics. [..] What was shown in the exhibit though was design that wasn't initially understandable, it made you stop and process the information, and therefore made you confront the weight of racial inequality on a global scale in both historical and modern contexts.”

Once you’ve made your way through all 20 of valentine’s charts, you move into smaller rooms, which house reproductions of Du Bois’ original works. A sense of déjà vu sets in. This was deliberate, says Duguid. “Her last print starts Du Bois’ first print, and his work is laid out in the reverse order that you experienced her work in, so it becomes like a shadow.” It throws into relief both how accurate valentine’s reimaginings are and how modern Du Bois’ originals are. It’s impossible to view the pieces just once. I found myself walking back and forth between the two sections, comparing the data sets. It was interesting to see, for example, how different kinds of jobs emerged over years and a wider variety of religions took hold among Black Americans. Most striking to me was the contrast between valentine’s “Free and incarcerated Black Americans,” a black and green area graph, that, with Du Bois’, “Proportion of freemen and slaves among American Negroes.” draws a parallel between American slavery and the modern carceral system. The numbers are different, but what kind of progress has been made if there are still people excluded from freedom? The questions that the work provokes encourage

repeat viewing. “They are deceptively simple in their creation,” says Duguid. but [..] you sit with them for a long time, you realize how much is there, in each one of them.”

jina valentine: *Exhibit of American Negroes, Revisited* runs through October 29th at the Glass Curtain Gallery, 1104 S Wabash Ave, 1st Floor. Monday–Friday, 9 a.m.–5 p.m.

There will be two artist talks in conjunction with the exhibit. With safety and accessibility in mind, the talks will be virtual, and posted on the department’s YouTube channel afterwards. On October 7th, valentine will be in conversation artist and researcher Mimi Ọnụọha and on October 28th she will be speaking with Tracie D. Hall, executive director of the American Library Association.