

B L A C K A G A I N S T T H E W O R L D

Afro-Pessimism & contemporary Black insurrection



Compiled by 高
with thanks to Taylor, Madeleine & Alexandria

[Caption-context for photographs coming soon]



We have nothing to lose but our chains-

ASSATA SHAKUR
7.4.1973

- 4 -

Grammars of Black suffering

*Natal alienation | Social death | Ontological isolation
General dishonor | Fungibility*

- 12 -

Antagonism v. Conflict: Towards an unflinching paradigmatic analysis

*Pitfalls of 'pragmatic solutionism' i.e. reformism 'from the
hold of the slave ship' (Saidiya Hartman)*

- 19 -

Carceral imagination & the Black imago

On 'being King Kong'

- 28 -

Lynching has always been legal

Black police state as white civil society

- 38 -

Ending the world

Gratuitous Freedom

i.
Grammars of Black suffering



Was my 'freedom' not given to me
in order to build the **world of the You?**

FRANTZ FANON

Black Skin, White Masks (The Fact of Blackness)

What happened to the slave in America is an interesting thing because it was a different kind of slavery. It was not for the purpose of domestic slavery as most slaves historically had been. This was for the development of a market economy. So the slave had to face other things in America that were unique to slavery in the world as we know it. **One of those things was the absolute destruction of your own self and your relationship to your history and yourself.** I always tell people: Where is my song? Where is my dance? Where is my country? Where is my flag? Where is my language? Where is my religion? Where is my clothing? Where is my cuisine? All of it erased. And nothing to replace it because the institution of slavery as it grew up in America became an institution in which the slave didn't have a relationship to the community in which the slave found himself.

That's an incredible statement when you think about it because it means not only are you not an African, this generic "African," but you're not anything else. You're a piece of property. What does that do to you? What kind of wounds does that do to you ontologically? What kind of wounds does that do to you psychologically? ... So when people talk about the breakdown of the black family today, I say you got a lot of nerve. **I'll tell you when the black family got broken down, it was the 1600s, 1700s.** When mothers and fathers were being sold away from each other and given new names, new identities and nothing else in return except a lifetime of labor.

ELAINE BROWN

New Age Racism

No **slavery**, no sugar, tobacco, rice, or cotton; no sugar, no British **empire**; no tobacco and rice, no **United States**; no cotton, no industrial revolution.

VINCENT BROWN

Black History is the Black Book of Capitalism

Unlike the concentration camp, the gulag, and the killing field, which had as their intended end the extermination of a population, the African trade created **millions of corpses**, but **as a corollary to the making of commodities**. To my eyes this lack of intention didn't diminish the crime of slavery but from the vantage of judges, juries, and insurers exonerated the culpable agents. **In effect, it made it easier for a trader to countenance yet another dead black body or for a captain to dump a shipload of captives into the sea in order to collect the insurance, since it wasn't possible to kill cargo or to murder a thing already denied life.** Death was simply a part of the workings of the trade.

SAIDIYA V. HARTMAN

Lose Your Mother: A Journey

Along the Atlantic Slave Route

TABLE I <i>The four 'peculiar institutions' and their basis</i>			
Institution	Form of labour	Core of economy	Dominant social type
Slavery (1619-1865)	unfree fixed labour	Plantation	slave
Jim Crow (South, 1865-1965)	free fixed labour	Agrarian and extractive	sharecropper
Ghetto (North, 1915-68)	free mobile labour	Segmented industrial manufacturing	menial worker
Hyperghetto & Prison (1968-)	fixed surplus labour	Polarized postindustrial services	welfare recipient & criminal

The relation between pleasure and the possession of slave property, in both the literal and figurative senses, can be explained in part by the fungibility of the slave - that is, the joy made possible by virtue of **the replaceability and interchangeability endemic to the commodity** - and by the extensive capacities of property - that is, the augmentation of the master subject through his embodiment in external objects and persons. **Put differently, the fungibility of the commodity makes the captive body an abstract and empty vessel vulnerable to the projection of others' feelings, ideas, desires, and values;** and, as property, the dispossessed body of the enslaved is the surrogate for the master's body since it guarantees his disembodied universality and acts as the sign of his power and dominion.

SAIDIYA V. HARTMAN

*Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery,
and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America*

The aporia between Black being and political ontology has existed since Arab and European enslavement of Africans, and **the need to craft an ensemble of questions through which to arrive at an unflinching paradigmatic analysis of political ontology is repeatedly thwarted in its attempts to find a language that can express the violence of slave-making**, a violence that is both structural and performative. Humanist discourse, the discourse whose epistemological machinations provide our conceptual frameworks for thinking political ontology, is diverse and contrary. **But for all its diversity and contrariness it is sutured by an implicit rhetorical consensus that violence accrues to the Human body as a result of transgressions, whether real or imagined, within the Symbolic Order.** That is to say, Humanist discourse can only think a subject's relation to violence as a contingency and not as **a matrix that positions the subject.** Put another way, Humanism has no theory of the slave because it imagines a subject who has been either alienated in language (Lacan) and/or alienated from his/her cartographic and temporal capacities (Marx).

It cannot imagine an object who has been positioned by gratuitous violence and who has no cartographic and temporal capacities to lose – a sentient being for whom recognition and incorporation is impossible. In short, political ontology, as imagined through Humanism, can only produce discourse that has as its foundation alienation and exploitation as a grammar of suffering, when what is needed (for the Black, who is always already a slave) is an ensemble of ontological questions that has as its foundation accumulation and fungibility as a grammar of suffering (Hartman).

The violence of the Middle Passage and the slave estate (Spillers), technologies of accumulation and fungibility, recompose and reenact their horrors upon each succeeding generation of Blacks. This violence is both gratuitous, that is, it is not contingent upon transgressions against the hegemony of civil society; and structural, in that it positions Blacks ontologically outside of humanity and civil society. Simultaneously, it renders the ontological status of humanity (life itself) **wholly dependent on civil society's repetition compulsion: the frenzied and fragmented machinations through which civil society reenacts gratuitous violence upon the Black – that civil society might know itself as the domain of humans – generation after generation.**

Again, **we need a new language of abstraction** to explain this horror. The explanatory power of Humanist discourse is bankrupt in the face of the Black. It is inadequate and inessential to, as well as parasitic on, the ensemble of questions which the dead but sentient thing, the Black, struggles to articulate in a world of living subjects.

FRANK B. WILDERSON III

Red, White, & Black (The Narcissistic Slave)

We need to think through Jena, too, in terms of the manner in which slave codes during the antebellum period constructed a **universe of fraudulent morality**, which continues to be perpetuated in two ways. First, in asserting the rule of law, white society shrouds the conditions of violent domination behind the myth of consent. The slave is presumed to give his or her consent to being dominated as a consequence of his or her utter powerlessness, or perfect subjugation. Second, slavery has such an extensive legal history precisely because the slave so frequently violated these terms, resisting the absolute authority of white civil society. **Much of the discursive order of slavery was preoccupied with how to mark the black body as socially dead and therefore as existing beyond the penumbra of legal rights and responsibilities.**

Simply put, the law decreed that the black body is a fraud. To be a fraudulent person is to impersonate a human being. **There is only one such position in the ontology of the modern Western world and it belongs to the black.** The lasting ideological and affective matrix of white supremacy admits no legitimate claims of black self-possession, self-determination, or autonomy in the face of white society's desire to possess, consume, and enjoy the captive body of blacks. This ethos of slavery is far more central to understanding violence against the black body than simply the immiserated conditions (including "disparate treatment" by the state and civil society) that blacks share with other people of color, workers, and the poor generally under global corporate capitalism.

DONALD F. TIBBS & TRYON P. WOODS

The Jena Six & Black Punishment:

Law and Raw Life in the Domain of Non-Existence



To speak of black social life and black social death, black social life against black social death, black social life as black social death, black social life in black social death – all of this is to find oneself in the midst of an argument that is also a profound agreement, an agreement that takes shape in (between) meconnaissance and (dis)belief. Black optimism is not the negation of the negation that is afro-pessimism, just as black social life does not negate black social death by inhabiting it and vitalizing it. A living death is as much a death as it is a living. **Nothing in afro-pessimism suggests that there is no black (social) life, only that black life is not social life in the universe formed by the codes of state and civil society, of citizen and subject, of nation and culture, of people and place, of history and heritage, of all the things that colonial society has in common with the colonized, of all that capital has in common with labor – the modern world system.** Black life is not lived in the world that the world lives in, but it is lived underground, in outer space. This is agreed. That is to say, what [Fred] Moten asserts against afro-pessimism is a point already affirmed by afro-pessimism, is, in fact, one of the most polemical dimensions of afro-pessimism as a project: namely, that black life is not social, or rather that black life is lived in social death. Double emphasis, on lived and on death. That's the whole point of the enterprise at some level. It is all about the implications of this agreed-upon point where arguments (should) begin, but they cannot (yet) proceed.

...

Those of us writing in a critical vein in the human sciences often use the phrase "relations of power" and yet we just as often gloss over the complexity of the idea of relation itself, and especially so regarding the relation that relation has with power, or, rather, regarding the way in which power obtains in and as relation. We are not afraid to say, for instance, that relations of power are complex, but we have less to offer when faced with the stubborn fact that relation itself is complex, that is, does not simply suggest a linkage or interaction between one thing and another, between subjects, say, or between objects, or between subjects and objects, or persons and things. ... This is an interrogation of power in its most intimate dimension. We learn not just that power operates intimately (which it does) or that intimacy is inextricable from the question of power (which it is), but that the relation between the two – when it is brought into view, within earshot, when it enters language – deranges what we mean, or what we thought we understood, by the former and the latter. **What is power? What is intimacy? How do we know this at all? How to communicate it? And where or when are these questions, and their relation, posed with greater force – political force, psychic force, historical force – than within the precincts of the New World slave estate, and within the time of New World slavery?** We still must ask at this late stage, "What is slavery?" The answer, or the address, to this battery of questions, involves a strange and maddening itinerary that would circumnavigate the entire coastline or maritime borders of the Atlantic world, enabling the fabrication and conquest of every interior – bodily, territorial, and conceptual. To address all of this is to speak the name of race in the first place, to speak its first word. What is slavery? And what does it mean to us, and for us? What does slavery mean for the very conception of the objective pronoun "us"?

JARED SEXTON

The Social Life of Social Death:

On Afro Pessimism and Black Optimism

I have thought long and hard, in the wake of [Wilderson and Sexton's] work, in a kind of echo of Bob Marley's question, **about whether blackness could be loved**; there seems to be a growing consensus that analytic precision does not allow for such a flight of fancy, such romance, but I remain under the impression, and devoted to the impression, that **analytic precision is, in fact, a function of such fancy**. And this, perhaps, is where the tension comes, where it is and will remain, not in spite of the love but in it, embedded in its difficulty and violence, **not in the impossibility of its performance or declaration but out of the exhaustion that is their condition of possibility**. More to the point, if Afro-pessimism is the study of this impossibility, the thinking that I have to offer (and I think I'm as reticent about the term black optimism as Wilderson and Sexton are about Afro-pessimism, in spite of the fact that we make recourse to them) moves not in that impossibility's transcendence but rather in its exhaustion. **Moreover, I want to consider exhaustion as a mode or form or way of life, which is to say sociality, thereby marking a relation whose implications constitute, in my view, a fundamental theoretical reason not to believe, as it were, in social death**. Like Curtis Mayfield, however, I do plan to stay a believer. This is to say, again like Mayfield, that I plan to stay a black motherfucker. ...



... What I assert is this: that black life – which is as surely to say life as black thought is to say thought—is irreducibly social; that, moreover, black life is lived in political death or that it is lived, if you will, in the burial ground of the subject by those who, insofar as they are not subjects, are also not, in the interminable (as opposed to the last) analysis, “death-bound,” as Abdul JanMohamed would say. **In this, however, I also agree with Sexton insofar as I am inclined to call this burial ground “the world” and to conceive of it and the desire for it as pathogenic**. At stake, now, will be what the **difference** is between the **pathogenic** and the **pathological**, a difference that will have been instantiated by **what we might think of as the view, as well as the point of view, of the pathologist**. I don't think I ever claimed, or meant to claim, that Afro-pessimism sees blackness as a kind of pathogen. **I think I probably do, or at least hope that it is, insofar as I bear the hope that blackness bears or is the potential to end the world.**

FRED MOTEN

Blackness and Nothingness: Mysticism in the Flesh

Since its inception, the United States has quested for a democracy complicit in, conflicted with, and in almost every sense tormented, if not crippled, by racial inequality and racist demagoguery. **The history of US racism is intricately linked to its economic system and acquisition of material wealth.** John Locke's *Second Treatise on Civil Government* extols the virtues of private property as an inherent right in a democracy. Written in the late seventeenth century, it would influence the ideology of eighteenth century founding fathers and provide a rationale for slavery property rights as integral to a fledgling democracy. In the nineteenth century, the Civil War...allegedly vanquished the great antithesis of democracy - slavery. The Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution theoretically freed the slaves, however, it **codified slavery by legalising 'involuntary servitude' for those convicted of a crime in a court of law.** Following the war, race rhetoric and economic profiteering in the post-bellum era fuelled the rise of lynchings and the convict lease system, both targeting African Americans.

W.E.B. du Bois Notes in *Black Reconstruction* that Southern planters began to rely solely on convict labour because of the profit margins as African Americans became imprisoned for minor infractions of the law or for simply being in the wrong place at the wrong time. **Neo-slavery, the new antithesis to democracy, focused on males but did not exempt females.** In the late, nineteenth century, black women laboured alongside black men in the same stockade, often yoked together during the work day. Economic motivations which produced burgeoning prison populations also led to the same gender parity in labour exploitation and brutality that had existed under slavery. **Considered expendable or disposable property when owned by the state, black freemen and women died at faster rates, worked to death in prisons such as Louisiana's Angola, than they had labouring on plantations as slaves.**

JOY JAMES

*The Dysfunctional & the Disappearing:
Democracy, Race and Imprisonment*

There is something organic to Black positionality that makes it **essential to the destruction of civil society.** There is nothing willful or speculative in this statement, for one could just as well state the claim the other way around: **There is something organic to civil society that makes it essential to the destruction of the Black body.**

FRANK B. WILDERSON III

The Prison Slave as Hegemony's Silent Scandal

ii.

Antagonism v. Conflict:
Towards an unflinching
paradigmatic analysis



So much of our political vocabulary/imaginary/desires have been implicitly integrationist even when we imagine our claims are more radical ... I think there's a certain integrationist rights agenda that subjects who are variously positioned on the color line can take up. And that project is something I consider obscene: **the attempt to make the narrative of defeat into an opportunity for celebration, the desire to look at the ravages and the brutality of the last few centuries, but to still find a way to feel good about ourselves. That's not my project at all,** though I think it's actually the project of a number of people. Unfortunately, the kind of social revisionist history undertaken by many leftists in the 1970s, who were trying to locate the agency of dominated groups, resulted in celebratory narratives of the oppressed.

SAIDIYA V. HARTMAN

The Position of the Unthought
(with Frank Wilderson)

There were local movements in each of these cities to protest acts of police murder and in each case the respective city governments were solicited to take appropriate action. Under conventional definitions of the government, we seem to be restricted to calling upon it for protection from its own agents. But what are we doing when we demonstrate against police brutality, and find ourselves tacitly calling upon the government to help us do so? **These notions of the state as the arbiter of justice and the police as the unaccountable arbiters of lethal violence are two sides of the same coin.** Narrow understandings of mere racism are proving themselves impoverished because they cannot see this fundamental relationship.

...

There are two possibilities: first, police violence is a deviation from the rules governing police procedures in general. Second, these various forms of violence (e.g., racial profiling, street murders, terrorism) are the rule itself as standard operation procedure. For instance, when the protest movements made public statements they expressed an understanding of police violence as the rule of the day and not as a shocking exception. However, when it came time to formulate practical proposals to change the fundamental nature of policing, all they could come up with concretely were more oversight committees, litigation, and civilian review boards ("with teeth"), none of which lived up to the collective intuition about what the police were actually doing. The protest movements' readings of these events didn't seem able to bridge the gap to the programmatic. The language in which we articulate our analyses doesn't seem to allow for alternatives in practice. **Even those who take seriously the second possibility (violence as a rule) find that the language of alternatives and the terms of relevance are constantly dragged into the political discourse they seek to oppose, namely, that the system works and is capable of reform.**

STEVE MARTINOT & JARED SEXTON

The Avant-Guard of White Supremacy

I had read it rightly. It was hate; I was hated, despised, detested, not by the neighbor across the street or my cousin on my mother's side, but by an entire race. **I was up against something unreasoned.** The psychoanalysts say that nothing is more traumatizing for the young child than his encounters with what is rational. I would personally say that for a man whose only weapon is reason there is nothing more neurotic than contact with unreason.

...

Negrophobes exist. It is not hatred of the Negro, however, that motivates them; they lack the courage for that, or they have lost it. Hate is not inborn; it has to be constantly cultivated, to be brought into being, in conflict with more or less recognized guilt complexes. Hate demands existence and he who hates has to show his hate in appropriate actions and behavior; **in a sense, he has to become hate.**

FRANTZ FANON
Black Skin, White Masks



Those who believe that affirmative action is the key anti-racist measure and litmus test for racial progressivism often do not analyse it alongside incarceration as the re-segregation of the disenfranchised for the racially privileged. **Affirmative action, vilified as racial or group preferences, is debated most often within the areas of employment and education, not in the areas of incarceration and execution.** In a conservative political climate, increased competition for jobs and educational slots as well as a counter-cultural movement to the civil rights gains of previous decades, have fostered advocacy for the resurgence of segregation. Despite economic and educational abundance in the United States, economic and educational access has been proven to be elusive for many (Black) Americans. **The demand for egalitarian economic and educational access has been destabilised by race rhetoric that obscures the relationship between racial-sexual disenfranchisement and corporate capitalism. Consequently, the political manipulation of racial and economic fears continues to reify racialised communities and fuel new forms of segregation.**

...

Affirmative action gains are overwhelmingly attributed to blacks in national racial rhetoric and imagery even though quantitatively the greatest beneficiaries have been white women, and increasingly other people of colour. **This attests to the endurance of the black/white binary in the American mind, and to the complementary racialisation of the deserving industrious sector as 'white' and the parasitic sector as 'black.'** But the concept of white group victimisation and the need for (white) racial redress appears even when there is no mention of race. Consider the anti-affirmative action rhetoric of Louisiana Governor Mike Foster who in 1997 labeled law students at Tulane's law clinic vigilantes for litigating in behalf of a local black neighborhood which, having suffered from toxic waste dumping in the past, opposed a chemical company locating a plant in their neighborhood. Foster threatened to revoke the University's tax breaks and revenues, while leaders of Chemical Consortium of Corporations vowed not to provide financial gifts to the school. The policing of students seeking to expand democratic power to impoverished and racially configured segments of the population became a function of the university. **In the new segregation, universities are becoming increasingly white while prisons are becoming increasingly black or brown as 'racial preferences' followed the imagined desires of ethnic majorities for safety as racial purity (although the vast majority of criminal assaults are intra-ethnic).** Students are not the only racially configured performers under affirmative action. Non-students function as performers in the penal economy. Racial group preferences, denounced in education and employment, are not equally condemned by conservatives and liberals. Affirmative action for prisons does not seem to agitate the national American conscience, or inspire as much debate in The Chronicle of Higher Education or President Bill Clinton's national conversation on race, as does affirmative action in education and employment. **The proliferation of prisons, described as the prison-industrial-complex by some human rights advocates and academics, is enmeshed in both educational and racial policies.** For instance, in 1997, California had the largest prison population with more of the state's general fund going to prisons than to higher education. **California prisons house twice the number of African-Americans as its four-year universities enroll.**

JOY JAMES

*The Dysfunctional & the Disappearing:
Democracy, Race and Imprisonment*

Let us be clear. Universities keep huge endowments, money on reserve, because they are supposed to keep money. They will always tell you they cannot afford you. They will not spend their money to save the life of a Black feminist.

Poet Laureate though she may be. Let us be clear. **The universities that we mistakenly label as our bright quirky only refuge for Black brilliance have worked our geniuses to death,** and have denied us help when we asked for it. The universities that employed June Jordan, Audre Lorde and so many others, watched cancer eat away at our geniuses, as they simultaneously ate away at black women's labor. **An institution knows how to preserve itself and it knows that Black feminists are a trouble more useful as dead invocation than as live troublemakers, raising concerns in faculty meetings. And those institutions continue to make money and garner prestige off of their once affiliated now dead faculty members.** The university was not created to save my life. The university is not about the preservation of a bright brown body. The university will use me alive and use me dead. The university does not intend to love me. The university does not know how to love me. The university in fact, does not love me. But the universe does.

ALEXIS PAULINE GUMBS
The Shape of My Impact

If the intimacy of power suggests the sheer difficulty of difference, the trouble endemic to determining where the white imagination ends and the black imagination begins, then the power of intimacy suggests, with no less tenacity and no less significance, that our grand involvement across the color line is structured like the figure of an envelope, folds folded within folds: a black letter law whose message is obscured, enveloped, turned about, reversed. Here a structure of violence is inscribed problematically in narrative, an inscription that can only struggle and fail to be something other than a writing-off, or a writing-over. The massive violence that founds and opens a structure of vulnerability, a world-making enjoyment of that violence of enjoyment disappears into the telos of resolution, the closure of family romance, the drive for kinship, where insistence replaces imposition. **Black rage converts magically to black therapeutics, a white mythology that disavows its points of origin in the theft that creates the crime and its alibi at once.** This illegible word, where affect drops away only to remain, is what [Christina] Sharpe terms "monstrous intimacy," "a memory for forgetting." And what would we do without it? Indeed, what might we do? What kind of politics might be possible across this gap, as wide as a river, as thin as a veil? It is a powerful misrecognition that enables an understanding of afro-pessimism as moving against black life, in other words, of pathologizing blackness. Blackness is not the pathogen in the afro-pessimist imagination and it is a wonder how one could read it so even as it is no wonder at all. **No, blackness is not the pathogen in afro-pessimism, the world is. Not the earth, but the world, and maybe even the whole possibility of and desire for a world.**

JARED SEXTON
*The Social Life of Social Death:
On Afro Pessimism and Black Optimism*



Blackness cannot be disimbricated from slavery, in the way that Irishness can be disimbricated from colonial rule or in the way that labor can be delinked from capital. The violence which subsumes the Irish has temporal limits (the time of the Troubles, from the late 1960s to the "Good Friday" Agreement of 1998) as well as spatial limits (the urban North). **Not only is there no punctuation in the temporality of the violence that subsumes [BLA soldier] Assata Shakur, but furthermore, no cartography of violence can be mapped, for that would imply the prospect for a map of non-violent space.** To the contrary, Assata's political communiqué demonstrates that she and other Black people are in the throes of what historian David Eltis calls "**violence beyond the limit,**" by which he means **(a) in the libidinal economy there are no forms of violence so excessive that they would be considered too cruel to inflict upon Blacks; and (b) in political economy there are no rational explanations for this limitless theatre of cruelty, no explanations which would make political or economic sense of the violence she describes** (as, for example, [Red Army Faction guerilla] Ulrike Meinhof does). Whereas the Human's relationship to violence is always contingent, triggered by her transgressions against the regulatory prohibitions of the Symbolic Order or by macro-economic shifts in her social context, the Slave's relationship to violence is open ended, gratuitous, without reason or constraint, **triggered by prelogical catalysts which are unmoored from her transgressions and unaccountable to historical shifts.**

FRANK B. WILDERSON III
*The Black Liberation Army
 & The Paradox of Political Engagement*

Elsewhere I have argued that the Black is a **sentient** being though **not a Human** being. **The Black's and the Human's disparate relationship to violence is at the heart of this failure of incorporation and analogy.** The Human suffers contingent violence, violence that kicks in when s/he resists (or is perceived to resist) the disciplinary discourse of capital and/or Oedipus. **But Black peoples' subsumption by violence is a paradigmatic necessity, not just a performative contingency.** To be constituted by and disciplined by violence, to be gripped simultaneously by subjective and objective vertigo, is indicative of a political ontology which is radically different from the political ontology of a sentient being who is constituted by discourse and disciplined by violence when s/he breaks with the ruling discursive codes.

When we begin to assess revolutionary armed struggle in this comparative context, we find that Human revolutionaries (workers, women, gays and lesbians, post-colonial subjects) suffer subjective vertigo when they meet the state's disciplinary violence with the revolutionary violence of the subaltern; but they are spared objective vertigo. This is because the most disorienting aspects of their lives are induced by the struggles that arise from intra-Human conflicts over competing conceptual frameworks and disputed cognitive maps, such as the American Indian Movement's demand for the return of Turtle Island vs. the U.S.'s desire to maintain territorial integrity, or the Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación Nacional's (FALN) demand for Puerto Rican independence vs. the U.S.'s desire to maintain Puerto Rico as a territory. **But for the Black, as for the slave, there are no cognitive maps, no conceptual frameworks of suffering and dispossession which are analogic with the myriad maps and frameworks which explain the dispossession of Human subalterns.**

FRANK B. WILDERSON III

*The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection
in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents*

iii.

Carceral imagination & the Black imago



FW: There's the fantasy of a Black as a phobic object, an object that will destroy you and you don't even know how it will destroy you, just an anxious threat, you know. And [scholar David Marriott] says, okay, that's a fantasy, but what's important, what psychoanalysis hasn't really figured out, is that what's important about this fantasy is that it is supported and coordinated with all the guns in the world. And I, the Black, can have a fantasy of white aggression, but it is not coordinated with any institutional power.

PH: Right.

FW: And he says if you go through generations, that it's really not immediately possible for you to simply genocide that unconscious hatred of yourself because the hatred of Black, of the Black, is also fundamental to being accepted in society. So he's saying that there's two things happening in the Black unconscious, one is a hatred of the Black, of aggressivity towards the Black imago which is the same aggressivity that society has, so that Denzel Washington can say at the end of *Training Day* "I'm King Kong." You know, my god.

PH: I actually laughed out loud, it was just ironically bitter when he said that in the movie, yeah.

FW: Shut up!

PH: I know.

FW: My God.

PH: I'm King Kong!

FW: *I'm King Kong!* So that's necessary to live in the world. And it's like damn, you're faced with this, like I said today, every Black person in Africa was incorporated into the question of captivity. That's really intense. To have a whole continent of people having to negotiate captivity. That's something no other people in the world have ever had happen to them.

FRANK B. WILDERSON III & PERCY HOWARD

Wallowing in the Contradictions

[*Scenes of Subjection*] is about the **problem of crafting a narrative for the slave as subject**, and in terms of positionality, asking, "Who does that narrative enable?" That's where the whole issue of empathic identification is central for me. **Because it just seems that every attempt to emplot the slave in a narrative ultimately resulted in his or her obliteration**, regardless of whether it was a leftist narrative of political agency - the slave stepping into someone else's shoes and then becoming a political agent - or whether it was about being able to unveil the slave's humanity by actually finding oneself in that position.

SAIDIYA V. HARTMAN

The Position of the Unthought
(with Frank Wilderson)

Formal emancipation of blacks from the social status of chattel was not a reality that whites could comprehend. Consequently, whites reserved a special place in their imaginations for the formerly enslaved subjects. In this way, **the dream of slavery lives on at the level of desire and identification**, the cultural dimension in which we have said it was most operative all along. Our analysis of slavery emphasized the symbolic economy precisely because it is this ethos that permits identifying slavery's afterlife in the symbols and signs that organize our society in the twenty-first century.

In other words, the culture of white supremacy, deeply embedded in the seminal concepts of Western society, means that whiteness remains dependent upon the accumulation of black bodies in new and more complex ways. **Two cultural codes took over from slavery: criminality and indebtedness. Both of these figures mark the zone of nonhumanity, demonstrating how, in the post-Emancipation era, the law retrenched antiblackness by simultaneously acknowledging and nullifying black people's new juridical status as free and equal citizens.** The passage of the Thirteenth Amendment; the adoption of Black Codes; the institutions of convict leasing, sharecropping, and debt peonage; and the widespread practice of lynching together make up the complementary methods of **recapturing the black body and suspending it in a state of permanent injury.** These methods also represent the material structures of the legal and economic systems that forge the discursive connection between blackness and criminality and form the basis for understanding the contemporary paradigm of policing. The Thirteenth Amendment simultaneously ended slavery in the generalized, formal sense and reconstituted it as the discrete point of reference for continued control over the freed people.

DONALD F. TIBBS & TRYON P. WOODS

The Jena Six & Black Punishment:

Law and Raw Life in the Domain of Non-Existence

Let's face it. **I am a marked woman**, but not everybody knows my name. "Peaches" and "Brown Sugar," "Sapphire" and "Earth Mother," "Aunty," "Granny," God's "Holy Fool," a "Miss Ebony First," or "Black Woman at the Podium:" I describe a locus of confounded identities, a **meeting ground of investments and privations** in the national treasury of rhetorical wealth. **My country needs me, and if I were not here, I would have to be invented.**

HORTENSE SPILLERS

Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book



As I begin to recognise that the Negro is the symbol of sin, I catch myself hating the Negro. But then I recognise that I am a Negro. There are two ways out of this conflict. Either I ask others to pay no attention to my skin, or else I want them to be aware of it. I try then to find value for what is bad - **since I have unthinkingly conceded that the black man is the colour of evil.** In order to terminate this neurotic situation, in which I am compelled to choose an unhealthy, conflictual solution, fed on fantasies, hostile, inhuman; in short, I have only one solution: to rise above this absurd drama that others have staged around me, to reject the two terms that are equally unacceptable, and through one human being, to reach out for the universal.

When the Negro dives--in other words, goes under--something remarkable occurs.

FRANTZ FANON

Black Skin, White Masks

Likewise, whatever furtive movements are or are not, any movements while black may be interpreted as furtive. Although the accounts of stop-and-frisk focus largely on the experiences of black men, the NYPD's stop-and-frisk program known as "Operation Clean Halls" targets and polices women, children, and men and has effectively placed "hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers...under siege in their own homes." As part of their mandate, such programs have surveilled and pathologized black women's and men's myriad expressions and performances of sexuality and desire. **The police who patrol these streets and halls often imagine and describe the black people in them as sexualized beasts and their "enforcing the law" in the language of sport and fun.** Stop-and-frisk policies lay bare what Hartman identifies as the "figurative capacities of blackness" that **"enable white flights of fantasy while increasing the likelihood of the captive's disappearance."**

CHRISTINA SHARPE

Blackness, Sexuality, and Entertainment

White contempt for [NFL running back Marshawn "Beast Mode"] Lynch has been thinly veiled, crude, and pervasive. The New York Post's Bart Hubbuch branded Lynch an "unprofessional dick" and a "childish jerk." **The New York Times' Juliet Macur channeled her Willie Horton, Central Park Five and George Stinney White angst to indict Lynch as a sexual beast: 'He flashed that grin when the gymnast Shawn Johnson - the [White] tiny and eternally adorable gold medalist from the 2008 Olympics - threw him a bag of Skittles as part of her gig with "Inside Edition." Lynch blew her a kiss and told her, "You're sexy, too." She ran off, blushing. (I cringed, only because I first wrote about Johnson when she was 15 - and she is 23 now, but still looks 15.)' A sabotaged ball game hardly registers when juxtaposed against the macabre mountain of Lynched black males and razed black towns whites have justified (celebrated) in the name of avenging an allegedly defiled pale woman. Lynch had the audacity to munch Skittles and live.** The cockiness to disobey master, not speak on command. The Orenthal-James-Simpson-gall to get fresh with a White Woman. Whites scripted Lynch as a petulant child rejecting White paternal authority by refusing to showcase a golden grin polished with White gratitude. A sassy nigger who needs reminding that his place is with the likes of Bay Area residents Bobby Hutton, Oscar Grant and Nubia Bowe. Whites provided him a plantation of dreams to escape the horrors of Oakland White Supremacy. And now he thinks he can defy white authority and keep his 'balls?'

GUS LAWRENCE

Castrating a Beast



Among the manifold effects of the wedding of ghetto and prison into an extended carceral mesh, perhaps the most consequential is the practical revivification and official solidification of the centuries-old association of blackness within criminality and devious violence. **Along with the return of Lombroso-style mythologies about criminal atavism and the wide diffusion of bestial metaphors in the journalistic and political field (where mentions of 'superpredators', 'wolf-packs', 'animals' and the like are commonplace), the massive over-incarceration of blacks has supplied a powerful common-sense warrant for 'using colour as a proxy for dangerousness.'** In recent years, the courts have consistently authorized the police to employ race as 'a negative signal of increased risk of criminality' and legal scholars have rushed to endorse it as 'a rational adaptation to the demographics of crime', made salient and verified, as it were, by the blackening of the prison population, even though such practice entails major inconsistencies from the standpoint of constitutional law. Throughout the urban criminal justice system, the formula 'Young + Black + Male' is now openly equated with 'probable cause' justifying the arrest, questioning, bodily search and detention of millions of African-American males every year. **In the era of racially targeted 'law-and-order' policies and their sociological pendant, racially skewed mass imprisonment, the reigning public image of the criminal is not just that of 'a monstrum—a being whose features are inherently different from ours', but that of a black monster, as young African-American men from the 'inner city' have come to personify the explosive mix of moral degeneracy and mayhem.** The conflation of blackness and crime in collective representation and government policy (the other side of this equation being the conflation of blackness and welfare) thus re-activates 'race' by giving a legitimate outlet to the expression of anti-black animus in the form of the public vituperation of criminals and prisoners.

LOIC WACQUAINT

From Slavery to Mass Incarceration

To have a black director behind the camera makes no substantive difference to the conventions of Hollywood filmmaking, whether at the level of narrative structure, plot, characterization, or film form. Directors may call the shots, but film studios and financial underwriters with pending distribution deals and potential consumer markets in mind always have the first and final word.

But if we do not see a qualitatively different kind of film from [Antoine] Fuqua, we do nonetheless find new dynamics at work. One such dynamic is an effect of the contradictory nature of the culture industry and it is heightened by the **entirely symbolic contributions of black directorial "control."** Another is a distinct but related by-product of this first development and points to a potential intensification of black spectators' "alienating identification" with the **images of absolute dereliction** that we find coded throughout Fuqua's work as the **hallmark of blackness**. What stands out is the fact that the "wrenching ambivalence" and "[great] psychic conflict" that might characterize the experience of black audiences in this cinema threatens to subsume the relations of Fuqua's productive labor, as the director too must participate in - indeed, must orchestrate scenes of his own subjection, party to his own deracination, and forced (by hook or by crook) to "feed well off [his] own abjection."

...

Antiblackness is best described [in Fuqua's films] as a series of forced choices (we all know the imperative "your money or your life") but choices that brook no answer - **neither the compulsory allegiance demanded by whiteness for its constituency's disciplined mobility, nor the vacillating inclusion/exclusion of the nonwhite immigrant, nor even the genocidal contest of sovereignty that structures the lived reality of American Indians**. For instance: Do you want to serve an extended prison sentence or sacrifice yourself to a sting operation of the national security state (as in *Bait*)? Do you want to wither indefinitely in a miserable refugee camp or fall victim to a military-sponsored campaign of ethnic cleansing (as in *Tears of the Sun*)? More simply: Do you want go home or go to jail (as in *Training Day*)? And where, exactly, is home, if you are black in the contemporary world? Do you want to take a trip to "the booty house" (as Detective Harris tauntingly refers to the county lockup) or languish on the streets of Los Angeles's skid row, strung out by an addiction to crack cocaine? Or, would you rather take a knife in the eye, a bullet in the head? Or, would you prefer to bleed to death from the wounds of a vigilante attack, castrated and raped in a state-sanctioned lynching? In what follows we will see that, although a chilling impetus seems to lie in the heart of our protagonist and the ensuing hazards are borne by his ungarded partner, **the moral arc of the universe is short and it bends toward whiteness**.

JARED SEXTON

The Ruse of Engagement

Black Masculinity & the Cinema of Policing

There is the story of the hard-core OG, down with the One Percent Nation, who kicked the pure fact in 1991 and declared this the era of the nigga. "It is the end of black folk, and the beginning of global niggadom," he proclaimed. The brother got props from a serious transnational corporation that gave his record global distribution in two media formats: audio and video. It was picked up and echoed in all formats of the news media, becoming a great event. Folks started buggin', and a panic set in. In other words, there was considerable acrimony. How has this brother gotten so lost? some asked. **Why would a serious transnational corporation be associated with a nigger? asked others who had considerable capital investment but little understanding of the communicability of affect.** Those concerned with the OG's soul wondered out loud where we have come to as a people. They wanted to know if this was the beginning of the end of black folk. Have our children come to achieve what four hundred years of slavery and oppression could not, the death of black folk? The OG stepped to these believers and busted 'em out.

"This is not the beginning of the end of black folk," he said. "They are always already dead wherever you find them. The nurturing haven of black culture which assured memory and provided a home beyond the ravishing growth of capitalism is no longer. There cannot be any cultural authenticity in resistance to capitalism. The illusion of immaterial purity is no longer possible. **It is no longer possible to be black against the system. Black folk are dead, killed by their own faith in willfully being beyond, and in spite of, power.** Will beyond power has no passion, only affect. Black folk have killed themselves by striving to conserve themselves in a willful affect - the productive labor of modern subjects, a.k.a. work. **Black folk, who have always been defined in relation to work, went the way of work."**

"There is a motto circulating these days: Real Black Folks Work. And where else can you find real black folk except in the killing fields, which is, by definition, the place for nonproductive consumption - the end of work? The killing fields, then, are the place of non-work for complete consumption of needless workers. Real black folk are already dead, walking around consuming themselves in search of that which is no longer possible, that which defines them. **Understand that the killing fields are everywhere;** and whoever is born after us in the killing fields will belong to a higher history, the history of the nigga. You all are upset by this because you don't know what it is to be a nigga. **A nigga is that which emerges from the demise of human capital, what gets articulated when the field nigger loses value as labor.** The nigga is unemployed, null and void, walking around like...a nigga. Who understands that all possibility converts from capital, and **capital does not derive from work."**

After this, the OG's record sales grew rapidly; so did the acrimony, and increasing pressure was put on the transnational corporation to be responsive to community standards of decency. No Niggaz Allowed was the sentiment, and the OG was censured. Ending his contractual relation with the transnational, he dropped more science. "You all ain't ready yet. You cannot even hear what is being spoken by your own children, let alone understand, **because you got your heads up your asses and are on capitalism's dick.** You may think I'm too early, but I'm just in time. Some straight up niggaz with attitude done already busted some serious nigga moves." At the same time he ended his contractual relation with the transnational, he incorporated his own independent label and hooked up with another transnational network of distribution. When called to account for his own blatant embrace of capitalism, **his only reply was: "It's a home invasion."**

RONALD A.T. JUDY

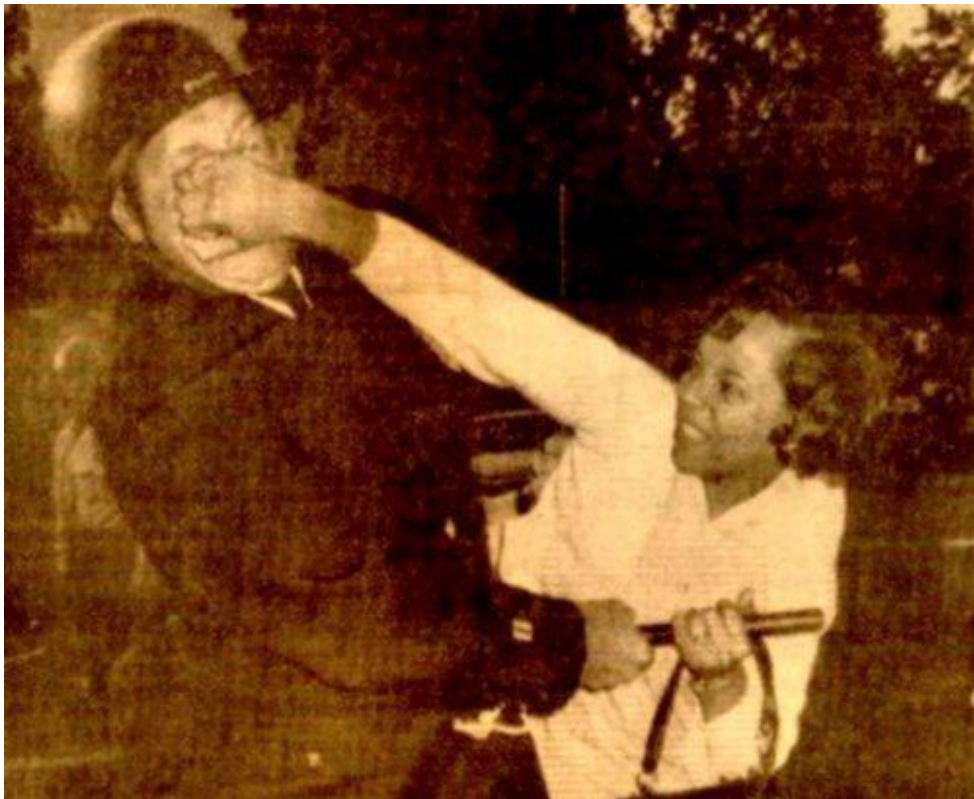
On the Question of Nigga Authenticity

If it is **not possible to undo the violence that inaugurates the sparse record of a girl's life** or remedy her anonymity with a name or **translate the commodity's speech**, then to what end does one tell such stories? How and why does one write a history of violence? Why revisit the event or the nonevent of a girl's death? The archive of slavery rests upon a founding violence. This violence determines, regulates and organizes the kinds of statements that can be made about slavery and as well it creates subjects and objects of power ... The archive yields no exhaustive account of the girl's life, but catalogues the statements that licensed her death. **All the rest is a kind of fiction: sprightly maiden, sulky bitch, Venus, girl. The economy of theft and the power over life, which defined the slave trade, fabricated commodities and corpses. But cargo, inert masses, and things don't lend themselves to representation, at least not easily?**

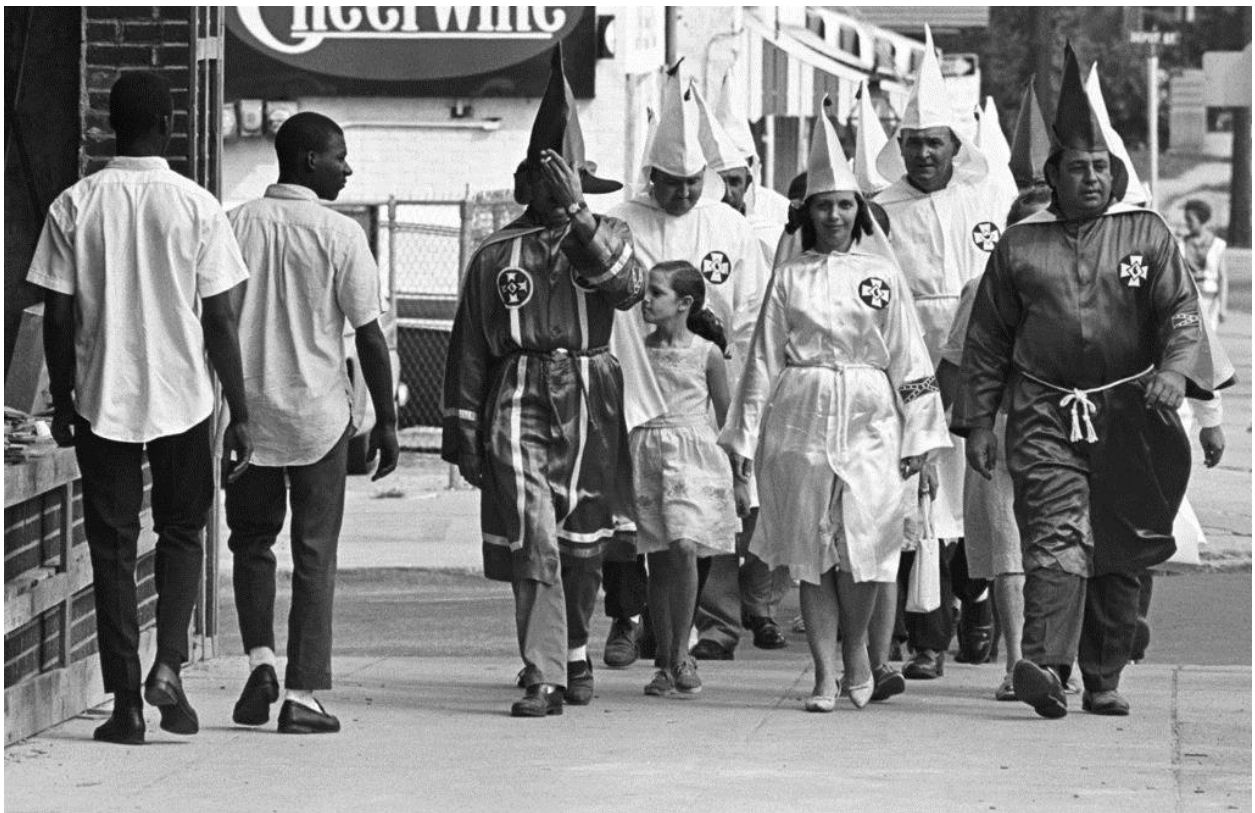
...

The intent of this practice is not to give voice to the slave, but rather to **imagine what cannot be verified**, a realm of experience which is situated between two zones of death – social and corporeal death – and to reckon with the precarious lives which are visible only in the moment of their disappearance. It is **an impossible writing which attempts to say that which resists being said** (since dead girls are unable to speak). It is a history of an unrecoverable past; it is a narrative of what might have been or could have been; it is a history written with and against the archive.

SAIDIYA V. HARTMAN
Venus in Two Acts



iv.
Lynching has
always been legal



Contemporary democrats have inherited a legacy of democracy in the US of a racist, imperial and capitalist state, one shaped by (neo)slavery, ethnic chauvinism, and patriarchal culture. In conventional political and social discourse, this legacy is occasionally referenced. **Yet most conventional race and democratic rhetoric not only obscure the past but also deny the current resurgence of racist and economic segregation. The inalienable right to property has a racial aspect: historically people of African descent were legally considered property, sources of capital through labour exploitation and a commodities market. Ownership belonged first to private entrepreneurs in the antebellum years and later to the state in the post-bellum years as governments imprisoned blacks to sell them to corporations.**

There is, though, another dimension of racial ownership in this nation: **whiteness functions as a form of property.** Historically, those with the existential capital of racial privilege have employed rhetoric, legal and military strategies and policies to maintain and protect this wealth. **Policing, setting borders for those worthy and unworthy of participating fully in US-style democracy, manifests as the racial endeavour of segregation, functioning on two levels: to contain blackness (whether it is associated with African, Latino/Chicano, Native, Arab or Asian Americans); and to protect whiteness, the mythological racial purity of Europeans.** The justification for policing is that it offers protection: protection from criminality and political extremism. **Marketed to the citizen-consumer, today the selling and buying of protection or insurance - moral, physical, psychological and political - exists in most racial containment (re-segregation) discourse, whether through advocacy for prisons or opposition to affirmative action.**

JOY JAMES

*The Dysfunctional & the Disappearing:
Democracy, Race and Imprisonment*

It is but hollow mockery of the Negro when he is beaten and bruised in all parts of the nation and flees to the national government for asylum, to be denied relief on the basis of doubtful jurisdiction. **The black man asks for protection and is given a theory of government.**

KELLY MILLER

*The Disgrace of Democracy -
Open Letter to Woodrow Wilson*

In order for nonviolence to 'work,'
your oppressor must have a conscience.

KWAME TURE

Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee

Statement on the Murder of Martin Luther King Jr.

The Afro-American militant is a 'militant' because he defends himself, his family, his home, and his dignity. **He does not introduce violence into a racist social system--the violence is already there, and has always been there.**

It is precisely this unchallenged violence that allows a racist social system to perpetrate itself. When people say that they are opposed to Negroes 'resorting to violence' what they really mean is that they are **opposed to Negroes defending themselves and challenging the exclusive monopoly of violence practiced by white racists.**

ROBERT F. WILLIAMS

Negroes With Guns

NYPD: It's clean.

FELIPE CORONEL: I know it's clean, dogg.

NYPD: Your license flagged on our system. Just a routine check. We're on high alert with the President coming to town-

FC: Got a lotta bigger problems than 'terrorism' in this motherfucker; this is the oldest war in America, aite? And ya'll know that. A war against-

NYPD: Sir, can you get in your car and leave?

FC: You know, you don't need to talk to me like that. I know what terrorism is, man. Back in the day all ya'll needed was a rope and a tree or some tar and some feathers and that's all ya'll needed, you know what I mean, to harass us, treat us like garbage.

NYPD: Get in the fucking car and leave!

FC: You know what? What you gonna do? Arrest me? Beat me up? That's right, a white cop ain't never done that to me before...Beware of the man who ain't got nothing to lose. We don't got no oil contracts, we don't got no weapons contracts, niggas don't got health care in the hood, we don't got nothing. We don't even own our own land, B. We don't got nothing to lose! You better be on high alert, you motherfucking pig-

FELIPE ANDRES CORONEL

This Revolution



This confluence of repetition and transformation, participation and subjection gets **conjugated inversely** so that the target becomes the aggressor and the uniformed aggressors become a priesthood, engineering a political culture whose construction is the practice of whiteness. What are wholly and essentially immanent are the structures of racist reason that produce practices without motive. "Police procedures" become pure form because they are at once both self-defined and subordinated to the implicit prerogatives of this political culture. **They empty the law of any content that could be called justice, substituting murderousness and impunity.** The "social procedures" that burgeon in the wake of this engineering also become pure form, emptying social exchange as the condition of white social cohesion. It flattens all ideals of political life to a Manichean structure that it depicts as whiteness versus evil. It is a **double economy**. On the one hand, there is an economy of clearly identifiable injustices, **spectacular flash points of terror**, expressing the excesses of the state-sanctioned system of racial categorization. **On the other, there is the structure of inarticulability itself and its imposed unintelligibility, an economy of the loss of meaning, a hyper-economy.** It is this hyper-economy that appears in its excess as banal; a hyper-injustice that is reduced and dissolved in the quotidian as an aura, while it is refracted in the images of the spectacular economy itself. Between the spectacular as the rule and the banal as excess, in each of the moment of its reconstruction, **the law of white supremacist attack signifies that there is no law.** This hyper-economy, with its hyper-injustice, is the problem we confront. The intractability of racism lies in its hidden and unspeakable terror, **an implicate ethic of impunity. A repetition of violence as standard operating (police) procedure, an insidious common sense, renders any real notion of justice or democracy on the map of white supremacy wholly alien and inarticulable.**

STEVE MARTINOT & JARED SEXTON
The Avant-Guard of White Supremacy

In such a paradigm, white people are, ipso facto, deputized in the face of Black people, whether they know it (consciously) or not. **Whiteness, then, and by extension civil society, cannot be solely "represented" as some monumentalized coherence of phallic signifiers, but must first be understood as a social formation of contemporaries who do not magnetize bullets.** This is the essence of their construction through an asignifying absence; their signifying presence is manifested by the fact that they are, if only by default, deputized against those who do magnetize bullets. In short, **white people are not simply "protected" by the police, they are – in their very corporeality – the police.**

This ipso facto deputization of white people in the face of Black people accounts for Fanon's materiality, and Martinot and Sexton's Manichean delirium in America. What remains to be addressed, however, is the way in which the political contestation between civil society's junior partners (i.e., workers, white women, and immigrants), on the one hand, and white supremacist institutionalism, on the other hand, is produced by, and reproductive of, a supplemental antiBlackness. Put another way: **How is the production and accumulation of junior partner social capital dependent upon on an anti-Black rhetorical structure and a decomposed Black body?**

...

A metaphor comes into being through a violence that kills the thing such that the concept might live. Gramscian discourse and coalition politics come to grips with America's structuring rationality – what it calls capitalism, or political economy – but not with its structuring irrationality, the anti-production of late capital, and the hyper-discursive violence that first kills the Black subject, so that the concept may be born. **In other words, from the incoherence of Black death, America generates the coherence of white life.** This is important when thinking the Gramscian paradigm and their spiritual progenitors in the world of organizing in the U.S. today, with their overvaluation of hegemony and civil society. Struggles over hegemony are seldom, if ever, asignifying. At some point, they require **coherence** and **categories for the record**, meaning they **contain the seeds of anti-Blackness.**

FRANK B. WILDERSON III

The Prison Slave as Hegemony's Silent Scandal

The record that the state has compiled on my activities **reads like that of ten men.** It labels me brigand, thief, burglar, gambler, hobo, drug addict, gunman, escape artist, Communist revolutionary, and murderer.

GEORGE L. JACKSON
*Soledad Brother:
The Prison Letters of George Jackson*



The highly particular conception of 'race' that America has invented, virtually unique in the world for its rigidity and consequentiality, is a direct outcome of the momentous collision between slavery and democracy as modes of organization of social life after bondage had been established as the major form of labour conscription and control in a underpopulated colony home to a precapitalist system of production. **The Jim Crow regime reworked the racialized boundary between slave and free into a rigid caste separation between 'whites' and 'Negros' – comprising all persons of known African ancestry, no matter how minimal – that infected every crevice of the postbellum social system in the South.** The ghetto, in turn, imprinted this dichotomy onto the spatial makeup and institutional schemas of the industrial metropolis. So much so that, in the wake of the 'urban riots' of the sixties, which in truth were uprisings against intersecting caste and class subordination, 'urban' and black became near-synonymous in policy making as well as everyday parlance. And the 'crisis' of the city came to stand for the **enduring contradiction between the individualistic and competitive tenor of American life, on the one hand, and the continued seclusion of African-Americans from it, on the other.** ... Now, the penal apparatus has long served as accessory to ethnoracial domination by helping to stabilize a regime under attack or bridge the hiatus between successive regimes: thus the 'Black Codes' of Reconstruction served to keep African-American labour in place following the demise of slavery while the criminalization of civil rights protests in the South in the 1950s aimed to retard the agony of Jim Crow. **But the role of the carceral institution today is different in that, for the first time in US history, it has been elevated to the rank of main machine for 'race making.'**

LOIC WACQUAINT
From Slavery to Mass Incarceration

Using "innocence" as the foundation to address anti-Black violence is an appeal to the white imaginary, though these arguments are certainly made by people of color as well. Relying on this framework re-entrenches a logic that criminalizes race and constructs subjects as docile. **A liberal politics of recognition can only reproduce a guilt-innocence schematization that fails to grapple with the fact that there is an a priori association of Blackness with guilt (criminality). Perhaps association is too generous – there is a flat-out conflation of the terms. ... We may fall back on such appeals for strategic reasons – to win a case or to get the public on our side – but there is a problem when our strategies reinforce a framework in which revolutionary and insurgent politics are unimaginable.** I also want to argue that a politics founded on appeals to innocence is **anachronistic** because it does not address the **transformation and re-organization of racist strategies** in the post-civil rights era.

A politics of innocence is only capable of acknowledging examples of direct, individualized acts of racist violence while obscuring the racism of structural level. Posing the issue in terms of personal prejudice feeds the fallacy of racism as an individual intention, feeling or personal prejudice, though there is certain a psychological and affective dimension of racism that exceeds the individual in that it is shaped by social norms and media representations. The liberal color blind paradigm of racism submerges race beneath the "commonsense" logic of crime and punishment. **This effectively conceals racism, because it is not considered racist to be against crime.**

While there are countless examples of overt racism, Black social (and physical) death is primarily achieved via a coded discourse of "criminality" and a mediated forms of state violence carried out by a **impersonal carceral apparatus** (the matrix of police, prisons, the legal system, prosecutors, parole boards, prison guards, probation officers, etc). **In other words – incidents where a biased individual fucks with or murders a person of color can be identified as racism to "conscientious persons," but the racism underlying the systematic imprisonment of Black Americans under the pretense of the War on Drugs is more difficult to locate and generally remains invisible because it is spatially confined.** When it is visible, it fails to arouse public sympathy, even among the Black leadership. ... **Black convicts, initially a part of the "we" articulated by civil rights groups, became them.**

JACKIE WANG

Against Innocence:

The Politics of Race, Gender & Safety

Black liberation, as a prospect, makes radicalism more dangerous to the U.S. This is not because it raises the specter of an alternative polity (such as socialism, or community control of existing resources), but because its condition of possibility and gesture of resistance function as a negative dialectic: a politics of refusal and a refusal to affirm, a "program of complete disorder." **One must embrace its disorder, its incoherence, and allow oneself to be elaborated by it, if indeed one's politics are to be underwritten by a desire to take down this country.** If this is not the desire that underwrites one's politics, then **through what strategy of legitimation** is the word "prison" being linked to the word "abolition"? **What are this movement's lines of political accountability?** There is nothing foreign, frightening, or even unpracticed about the embrace of disorder and incoherence. The desire to be embraced, and elaborated, by disorder and incoherence is not anathema in and of itself. No one, for example, has ever been known to say "gee-whiz, if only my orgasms would end a little sooner, or maybe not come at all." **Yet few so-called radicals desire to be embraced, and elaborated, by the disorder and incoherence of Blackness – and the state of political movements in the U.S. today is marked by this very Negrophobogenesis:** "gee-whiz, if only Black rage could be more coherent, or maybe not come at all." Perhaps there is something more terrifying about the joy of Black than there is in the joy of sex (unless one is talking sex with a Negro). **Perhaps coalitions today prefer to remain in-orgasmic in the face of civil society – with hegemony as a handy prophylactic, just in case.** If, through this stasis or paralysis they try to do the work of prison abolition, that work will fail, for it is always work from a position of coherence (i.e., the worker) on behalf of a position of incoherence of the Black subject, or prison slave. In this way, **social formations on the Left remain blind to the contradictions of coalitions between workers and slaves.** They remain coalitions operating within the logic of civil society and **function less as revolutionary promises than as crowding out scenarios of Black antagonisms,** simply feeding our frustration.

FRANK B. WILDERSON III

The Prison Slave as Hegemony's Silent Scandal



Lynching remains the phenomenon from the Reconstruction era that provides the most paradigmatic illustration of how the phoenix of slavery rose from its legal ashes stronger than ever before. **Lynching is the archetype for contemporary techniques of antiblack policing for three primary reasons.** First, it provides cohesion for white civil society against the perceived threat of blackness, and enforces allegiance to white supremacy; second, gratuitous violence against black bodies is the language through which this solidarity is achieved; and third, it is the bridge between slavery and the contemporary prison industrial complex in terms of the impunity claimed by the police and white people's prerogative to ignore this antiblack violence.

We reject the notion that lynching was simply the expression of white civil society and not a form of state terror; **the fact that it was not officially organized by the state is merely a technical point made persuasive by the hegemony of the law.** On the other hand, we have been analyzing the law in terms of actions, not simply what is written in legislative statutes. In this regard, then, the usual description of lynching as "extra-legal," as in "not regulated or sanctioned by law," has no purchase in our analysis. **To the contrary, lynching was, in keeping with American-style contradictions, simultaneously illegal and legal.** Torture, rape, and murder have always been illegal in this country, as have trial, conviction, and execution without due process. These practices have long been permissible against blacks, of course, but that underscores the point, rather than overrules it: **black bodies have always and already been seized, searched, tried, and convicted.**

In our analysis, lynching is "legal" in two senses. First, it is conducted **by whites with impunity, often by law enforcement itself.** Second, lynching reveals the "law" of white supremacy governing U.S. society and mandating the bodily dispossession of all blacks in the face of white authority. That lynching was a socially customary practice that ultimately became legal is most clearly seen in the impunity with which lynch mobs operated; in **how law enforcement would aid and abet the actions of the mobs;** in the high rates of membership by local and federal law enforcement personnel in the Ku Klux Klan; and in the manner in which lynching was eventually contained (not eliminated). Furthermore, the containment occurred through political pressure by the racial state on local elites who discouraged the practice amongst the white working class that did the heavy lifting of racial terror – not by means of prosecuting perpetrators or prohibiting the practice through legislative fiat.

Indeed, the fact that one of the most prominent manifestations of organized black resistance to racial rule during this era took the form of a campaign by black leaders for federal antilynching legislation supports our argument. **It is not that the antilynching campaign, led by Ida B. Wells-Barnett and the NAACP, was not historically significant and did not produce important effects, because it achieved both of these things. Rather, the point is that black opposition sought redress for injuries that were already**

simultaneously prohibited and permitted by law by petitioning the racial state for more law. This paradoxical quality to white supremacy was, and remains, essential to its operation. Although murder is illegal, the law permits, and indeed facilitates, white violence against blacks. The need for a specific legal prohibition against lynching **simply underscores the degree to which the law does not recognize black humanity.**

Lynching, too, produced social cohesion out of terrorism. The violence generated allegiance to white supremacy by conjuring the specter of social disorder; in so doing it indulged the parasitic fantasies of white society. In this way, **lynching was instrumental in reproducing the culture of slavery after its official demise. Lynchings were public rituals that literally created white communal spaces: torture and killing of black people provided one of the few occasions when the class divisions of white society were overcome.** Between 1882 and 1946, there were at least five thousand recorded lynchings in the United States, almost one every three days (in February 1893, there was practically one lynching per day). Nonetheless, this figure only just begins to embody the violence directed against black communities. White mobs attacked blacks throughout the country during this period, leading to numerous race riots and thousands of deaths. In all cases, this violence against black people has been gratuitous: although the pretexts for this violence varied—fictional black rapists, revenge for perceived affronts to white superiority, competition over jobs, and suppression of black voting rights, to name a few — **it was all in response to nothing but black existence.**

In the realm of white mob violence, the law as legal discourse and disciplinary practice subtends the symbolic arena; in this regard, lynching teaches us that policing is profoundly psychological, reinforcing the authority of white power. **In lynching, then, we see the constituent elements of modern policing: impunity, solidarity, terror, and public bodies fungible for white civic pleasure.** Since a basic indicator of social parasitism is when one group's pain is another group's pleasure, we should recall the words of Richard Wright and Cornel West, cited earlier: **black death provides the very conditions of possibility for white life.**

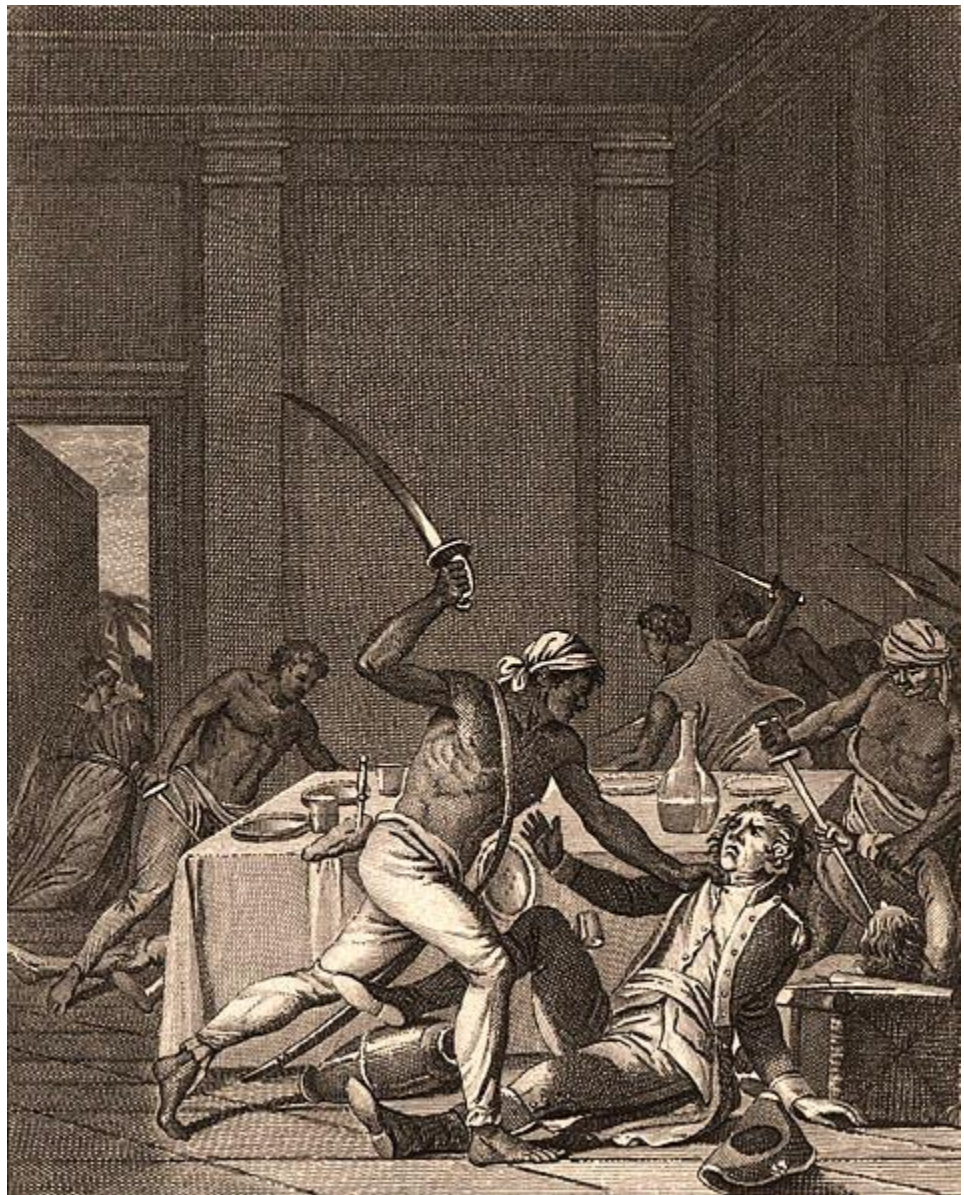
DONALD F. TIBBS & TRYON P. WOODS

The Jena Six & Black Punishment:

Law and Raw Life in the Domain of Non-Existence

v.

Ending the world



Many pacifist scholars and activists consider the strategies and tactics of armed revolutionaries in First World countries to be short-sighted bursts of narcissism. What pacifist detractors forget, however, is that for [Antonio] Gramsci, the strategy of a War of Position is **one of commandeering civic and political spaces one trench at a time** in order to turn those spaces into **pedagogic locales for the dispossessed**; and this process is one which combines peaceful as well as violent tactics as it moves the struggle closer to an all-out violent assault on the state. The Black Liberation Army and their White revolutionary co-defendants may have been better Gramscians than those who critique them through the lens of Gramsci. Their tactics (and by tactics I mean armed struggle as well as courtroom performances) were no less effective at winning hearts and minds than candle light vigils and "orderly" protests. **If the end-game of Gramscian struggle is the isolation and emasculation of the ruling classes' ensemble of questions, as a way to alter the structure of feeling of the dispossessed so that the next step, the violent overthrow of the state, doesn't feel like such a monumental undertaking, then I would argue the pedagogic value of retaliating against police by killing one of them each time they kill a Black person, the expropriating of bank funds from armored cars in order to further finance armed struggle as well as community projects such as acupuncture clinics in the Bronx where drug addicts could get clean, and the bombing of major centers of U.S. commerce and governance, followed by trials in which the defendants used the majority of the trial to critique the government rather than plead their case, have as much if not more pedagogic value than peaceful protest.** In other words, if not for the "pathological pacifism" (Churchill) which clouds political debate and scholarly analysis there would be no question that the BLA, having not even read Gramsci, were among the best Gramscian theorists the U.S. has ever known. But though the BLA were great Gramscian theorists, they could not become Gramscian subjects. **The political character of one's actions is inextricably bound to the political status of one's subjectivity;** and while this status goes without saying for [white members of the BLA David] Gilbert and [Judy] Clark, it is always in question for [BLA soldier-anarchists Kuwasi] Balagoon and [Safiya] Bukhari.

FRANK B. WILDERSON III

*The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection
in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents*

I am an extremist. I call for extreme measures to solve extreme problems. Where face and freedom are concerned I do not use or prescribe half measures. To me life without control over the determining factors is **not worth the effort of drawing breath.**

...

The entire colonial world is watching the blacks inside the U.S., wondering and waiting for us to come to our senses. Their problems and struggles with the Amerikan monster are much more difficult than they would be if we actively aided them. We are on the inside. We are the only ones (besides the very small white minority left) who can get at the monster's heart without subjecting the world to nuclear fire. We have a momentous historical role to act out if we will. **The whole world for all time in the future will love us and remember us as the righteous people who made it possible for the world to live on.** If we fail through fear and lack of aggressive imagination, then the slaves of the future will curse us, as we sometimes curse those of yesterday. I don't want to die and leave a few sad songs and a hump in the ground as my only monument.

GEORGE L. JACKSON

Soledad Brother:

The Prison Letters of George Jackson

All this time three policemen had been standing about fifty feet away from us while we kept waiting in the car for them to come and rescue us. Then **when they saw that we were armed and the mob couldn't take us,** two of the policemen started running. One ran straight to me, grabbed me on the shoulder, and said, "Surrender your weapon! Surrender your weapon!" I struck him in the face and knocked him back away from the car and put my carbine in his face, and **told him that we didn't intend to be lynched.** The other policeman who had run around the side of the car started to draw his revolver out of the holster. **He was hoping to shoot me in the back.** They didn't know that we had more than one gun. One of the students (who was seventeen years old) put a .45 in the policeman's face and told him that if he pulled out his pistol he would kill him. The policeman started putting his gun back in the holster and backing away from the car, and he fell into the ditch.

There was a very old man, an old white man out in the crowd, and he started **screaming and crying like a baby,** and he kept crying, and he said, "God damn, God damn, **what is this God damn country coming to** that the niggers have got **guns,** the niggers are **armed** and the police **can't even arrest them!**" **He kept crying** and somebody led him away through the crowd.

ROBERT F. WILLIAMS

Negroes With Guns

Before going back to college, i knew i didn't want to be an intellectual, spending my life in books and libraries without knowing what the hell is going on in the streets. **Theory without practice is just as incomplete as practice without theory.** The two have to go together.

ASSATA SHAKUR

Assata: An Autobiography



SVH: I think that gets at one of the fundamental ethical questions/problems/crises for the West: the status of difference and the status of the other. It's as though in order to come to any recognition of common humanity, the other must be assimilated, meaning in this case, utterly displaced and effaced: "Only if I can see myself in that position can I understand the crisis of that position." That is the logic of the moral and political discourses we see every day – the need for the innocent black subject to be victimized by a racist state in order to see the racism of the racist state. You have to be exemplary in your goodness, as opposed to...

FW: [laughter] A nigga on the warpath!

SAIDIYA V. HARTMAN

The Position of the Unthought
(with Frank Wilderson)

The structural, or paradigmatic, violence that subsumes Black insurgents' cognitive maps and conceptual frameworks, subsumes my scholarly efforts as well. **As a Black scholar, I am tasked with making sense of this violence without being overwhelmed and disoriented by it.** In other words, the writing must somehow be indexical of that which exceeds narration, while being ever mindful of the incomprehension the writing would foster, the failure, that is, of interpretation were the indices to actually escape the narrative. **The stakes of this dilemma are almost as high for the Black scholar facing his/her reader as they are for the Black insurgent facing the police and the courts.** For the scholarly act of embracing members of the Black Liberation Army as beings worthy of empathic critique is terrifying. One's writing proceeds with fits and starts which have little to do with the problems of building the thesis or finding the methodology to make the case.



As I write, I am more aware of the rage and anger of my reader-ideal (an angry mob as readers) than I am of my own interventions and strategies for assembling my argument. Vertigo seizes me with a rash of condemnations that emanate from within me and swirl around me. I am speaking to me but not through me, yet there seems to be no other way to speak. I am speaking through the voice and gaze of a mob of, let's just say it, **White Americans;** and my efforts to marshal a mob of Black people, to conjure the Black Liberation Army smack of compensatory gestures. It is not that the BLA doesn't come to my aid, that they don't push back, but neither I nor my insurgent allies can make the case that we are worthy of our suffering and justified in our actions and not terrorists and apologists for terror who should be locked away forever. How can we be worthy of our suffering without being worthy of ourselves? I press on, even though the vertigo that seizes me is so overwhelming that its precise nature—subjective, stemming from within me, or objective, catalyzed by my context, the raging throng—cannot be determined. **I have no reference points apart from the mob that gives no quarter.** If I write "freedom fighter," from within my ear they scream "terrorist!" If I say "prisoner of war," they chant "cop killer!" Their denunciations are sustained only by assertion, but they ring truer than my painstaking exegesis. **No firewall protects me from them; no liberated psychic zone offers me sanctuary.**

FRANK B. WILDERSON III

*The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection
in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents*

Right before George Jackson was murdered, Angela Davis was being interviewed by a journalist, who asked her: 'George Jackson has said that America is a fascist state. Do you agree with that?' **And what's important here is the next thing that she said, because this is the moment where we see how the Black psyche is coerced by the hydraulics of terror.** She said that, 'if I were to say as Jackson did that America is a fascist State, the only way I can say that is if there were some outside force that was ready to come in and deal with it', and she referenced the Americans and the allies going into Nazi Germany, bombing the hell out of it, and turning it into something other than a fascist state. So what I'm trying to say here, and this is something that happens to all Black people including myself, is that **you're faced with this person who wants something coherent from you**, so her mind moves from the question, which is a question of pure analysis, 'is this fascism?', and shifts over to the register of Lenin's question, 'what is to be done?' **What her unconscious here had done at that moment is to realize that the totality of the fascism we live in is beyond what I can think of as redress.** So let me then corrupt my own analysis, and say that this is not fascism, so that I can have some kind of speech act about what is to be done. She avoided the question, or the unconscious made a switch from pure analysis to 'ooh, let me come up with an answer.' This is what happens to us all the time.

If we can help Black people to stay, as Saidiya Hartman says, 'in the hold of the ship', that is, to stay in a state of pure analysis, then we can learn more about the totality and the totalizing nature of Black oppression. **And then, move into a conversation about what is to be done, realizing that our language and our concepts** (post-colonial, marxist discourse) **are so much a part of other peoples' problems, problems that can be solved, that we'll really never get to the thing that solves our problem – because it's already there in Fanon: the end of the world – because at least if we don't have a strategy and tactics for this end of the world, at least we will not have altered and corrupted our space of pure analysis** to make it articulate with some kind of political project.

FRANK B. WILDERSON III
"We're Trying to Destroy the World"
Anti-Blackness & Police Violence After Ferguson



I've visited Detroit, Portland, St. Louis, Newburgh and many little towns across the nation that you'd least expect. In their history, all experienced uprisings that would break the segregation of communities. **But we have come far from our slave ships only to see our own brothers and sisters lead us back unto cages again. Blacks, Latinos, non-whites, all move through a white world with boots on the necks of the poorest Black people. White hands design a world where Black life is a second thought as they plan our bridges, our cities and our education. Still, we imagine a world outside, an unknown that breaks the confines of our idleness.** Growing up in Far Rockaway, Queens, New York the neighborhood was its own world: boardwalks, sand in the streets, blue NYPD police cars, and tall housing projects. In the nineties I remember a massive renovation of the projects I lived in – grey, aging window frames replaced with new, black insulated frames. The multiple-story buildings, each apartment on each floor receiving the new upgrade treatment. During this time, I remember peeking out and seeing a dead, bloodied body in the street down below. From the seventh floor, I couldn't tell if the man's neck was slashed or if his body was riddled with bullet holes. My childhood was also filled with toys for Christmas, fireworks and water guns for the Fourth of July.

The contrast between innocent childhood and street violence in broad daylight, crack smoking, drug running was normal to me. I thought it was just life. By the time I was seven years old,

things changed for me. I experienced my first encounter with police officers. **I was taken away from my parents by court officers – men and women armed with guns.** My parents tried to hold me tight, in my white blazer and red bowtie. But their tears and screams created no empathy from the officers. Since then I've wondered why this world wants me to be so poor and Black in America, to be homeless and a dropout in America. The courthouses that are swept and maintained, the housing project windows replaced for better heat by union labor. The polluting middle class cars that drive on highways built around poor Black neighborhoods. Born in an open-air prison, an America that continues to improve for those on the top, I've always been a disposable and forgotten human being. **A criminal life is a prouder life than being subjugated to white life.** It is a **survivalist reaction** to the **desperation born out of broken families and minds.**

A world constructed around the hatred of my skin, a world where others who look like me also persecute and belittle me. I am mis-educated; I am alienated. I am wrong for my way of thinking. I am too tense. I did not pursue a class in African American studies. **The same people who make money from movements never speak for us, but only about us.** We are still in pain, pushing our broken down cars down the street. Aging grandmothers lost in nursing homes and our children go without homes, placed with foster parents who worship God and beat them every night. Our bodies continue to be exploited, abused and cast aside. My cousin's best friend's son, Tamon Robinson, was unarmed when he was run over by a police car for stealing path stones. **Hashtags and viral videos beam out from high-tech phones and computers, but that did not happen for him. What happened to Tamon could have happened 200 years ago with a horse drawn carriage and slave patrol. The printing press would publish the news for its small village audience: "Thief Negro Found Slain."**

Hypothetically and realistically, our deaths even centuries later remain very public, gruesome and still go unnoticed over and over. After her suicide, my partner of five years, Ashlee Blake, was brought to the bottom of the stairs in a black bag, where medical workers casually dropped her on the floor. At that point I was too shocked, too broken to be angry, or to scream. I cried in the arms of a friend, wondering: if she were white would they have dropped her body carelessly the same way? My anger boils up and I wonder if I am really as alone as it has always felt. **I dream of robbing banks, blowing up shopping malls, shooting the president, and dying in a blaze of heroic gunfire, having annihilated the world that mocks me. Happy in spite of so**

much suffering. But then I am reduced to designing posters and doing trust exercises with salaried community organizers.

You who fly over us in your airplanes, on your trips around the world. **Brown faces with mouths that speak many languages, many come already knowing we are Niggers.** They look down – these are the same houses we live in, the subways that we take, the traffic lights we hope will stay red to give us time to cross the street. We exist here as our beautiful corpses rot away, the living Black bodies that move as a herd, needed when called upon – to vote, to shop, to sing, yet hated, whipped and repressed. Our minds and bodies survive day by day with the hope we will be rich, not free. For the money I only saw Niggers smarter and stronger than me fall by wayside, embarrassed because of their McDonald's hats, their late night jobs stocking the shelves. They have to sell heroin and molly again. **They were better than me but a dime bag, or a gun that wasn't even really there condemned them forever to a ghostly second-class citizen life. A felon. Our most talented, yet we wag our fingers.** We know what's wrong, we know what's good for them, it was written ages ago. Not gone but forgotten, what's left is a second-class movement – people who wanted power but could no longer be numb. A group of ambulance chasers and spectacle seekers making the same mistake over and over again. **We expect a conscience from someone.** We expect someone in power – behind the fighter jets, the tanks and the gold bars in Fort Knox – to stop and listen.

For freedom may mean that the alienated, the mis-educated, the thugs, the orphans will be your equals. Your sweat, your readings, your struggle proves you are human, but to the white man it will mean less. The education I received surviving outside of whiteness will mean more. The bodies of the dead around me will be remembered and you will love them, not "loved" them in the past tense. We do not know Marx, Black bourgeois theories or savings accounts. But we have survived the gun battles, hiding our children from police and gangsters. Your idols will look different in their suits and ties – their trophies and plaques will be scars and bullet wounds, stretch marks and missing teeth, the smiles that make you uncomfortable. They will all be real. That is the freedom I am looking for.

MESSIAH RHODES
The Lumpen-Blacks