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Theory & Event, Volume 21, Number 1, January 2018, pp. 2-67 (Article)

Published by Johns Hopkins University Press



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Notes from the Kitchen, the Crossroads, and Everywhere Else, too: Ruptures of Thought, Word, and Deed from the “Arbiters of Blackness Itself”

M. Shadee Malaklou and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard

Abstract This essay provides a robust introduction to the vexed and generative terrains of Afro-pessimisms and black feminisms. Taken together, the essays reviewed address what each tendency says about the nature of black positionality and the significance of the meanings and histories attached to black female flesh and the slave polity—the “arbiters of blackness itself”¹—via considerations of deep literacy, psychoanalysis, sound theory, black m/othering, drama, ethnography, material conditions of knowledge production, canon formation, intellectual appropriation, coalition politics, state and vigilante murder and sexualized violence, and the risk of repeating Euro-American Enlightenment through mischaracterizing the relationship between colonialism and slavery.

And you see me kinda grinnin’ while I’m scrubbin’
And you say, “What’s she got to grin?” ...
But I’m counting your heads
As I’m making the beds
Cuz there’s nobody gonna sleep here,
Tonight...

Pirate Jenny, popularized by
Nina Simone in *Little Girl Blue* (1957)²

My mother did not live by America’s rules.

Assata Shakur, *Ode to My Mother* (1998)³

It should be clear to those who read this literature that Afro-pessimism is made possible by the critical labors of a particular strand of *Black* feminism, a la [Saidiya] Hartman and [Hortense] Spillers.

Frank B. Wilderson III, “Afro-pessimism and friendship” (2016)⁴

Those of us who have been “touched by the mother” need acknowledge that her ability to provide care, food, and refuge often has placed her in great jeopardy and, above all, required

her to give with no expectation of reciprocity or return. ...These labors...nourish the latent context of the fugitive. They enable those who were “never meant to survive” to sometimes do just that. This care, which is coerced and freely given, is the black heart of our social poesis, of making and relation.

Saidiya Hartman, “The Belly of the World” (2017)⁵

Take away the miseries and you take away some folks’ reason for living. Their conversation piece anyway.

Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters* (1980; 1992)⁶

This project responds to informal and vernacular—what contributor Zenzele Isoke describes in her experimental essay as “black decolonial imaginary”, or “kitchen” —objections to Afro-pessimism made by black women, including the presumably promiscuous intellectual histories and practices that underwrite this tendency in black thought. As contributor Selamawit D. Terrefe’s phrasing in her included essay “Speaking the Hieroglyph” describes them, these figures as problems in the world and as rebellious critics serve as the “arbiters of blackness itself.” Lamentations by black people who plead plainly and personally against what they identify as Afro-pessimism’s nihilistic surrender to social death suggest that the intervention that calls itself/is called Afro-pessimism is more than just a contested and/or “unclear”⁷ word. Afro-pessimism, which stays with the pain of the non-movement and stasis that obstructs black feminist freedom dreams for an “elsewhere and elsewhen,”⁸ is an especially painful word, too. Scholars have elaborated the pain of Afro-pessimism’s nihilistic posture in private conversations, at conferences, and on public social media platforms. Afro-pessimism, they have argued, does not resonate with the imagination, belief, dignity, spirit, divinity, and beauty that ennoble the guarantee and promise of the black rebellion Saidiya Hartman describes as “the slave female’s refusal.”⁹

As contributor Jeramy DeCristo explains of the larger field in which Afro-pessimism operates,

Much of the discourse on black abjection has argued that blackness symbolizes the ontological oblivion of subjectivity and selfhood. In this abject economy blackness becomes the site of a prescriptive non-value and an ontological silence, drowned out by the dross of the larger social. Ironically, in these equations it is blackness as that supposed abeyant silence that is named while “the social” becomes the silent and unmarked taken-for-granted of discursive analysis.

The essays included in this volume begin from this space of “non-value and [...] ontological silence” to reflect on a gendered tension between

Afro-pessimism and black feminism as sites of black knowledge production. They do so without reducing Afro-pessimism to an entitled hyper-masculinity or black feminism to an injured hyper-female subject pleading for attention. In fact, the contributors and their nuanced ways of understanding the manufacture of gender and the damage which gendered social categories do to black sociality work to disabuse us of this binary.

That Afro-pessimism is experienced as an “ugliness” — as contributor Selamawit D. Terrefe encourages us to think about it, as the pain of recognition, of seeing oneself reflected b(l)ack plainly — perhaps too, as an obstacle and/or a lie by those people who bear the weight of world-structuring antiblack violence most acutely — black women, who in spite of exhaustion and defeat agitate for different horizons of possibility for black life (for all of us) — prompted us to hold a space in which Afro-pessimism and black feminism could be read together to diachronically map the metaphysical and metapolitical im/possibilities of racial blackness as an embodied experience. We hoped that, in such a space, Afro-pessimism and black feminism could be explored: 1) in an exquisite tension without creating new binaries, 2) not merely in abstractions and theory-speak, but 3) in/as those moments we dare to speak (write) plainly and personally about the need to theorize and reflect on black relationality — as black sociality, vitality, creativity, grace, resilience, beauty, monstrosity, cruelty, and deviance — if black folks and especially the black women who carry black communities are to survive the interminability of premature death, violence, and pervasive racism. Because we, too, have at times appreciated Afro-pessimism’s theoretical elegance, it’s call to study instead of jumping into the social movement fray, in an ardent desire to learn more of the meanings black people make about these conditions and paradoxes that make up our lives, we have pursued it and also found ourselves, at times, trapped by its contradictions and the flesh that lines its intellectual edifice.

The writers featured in this volume answer the call to make home in the interstitial and painful and deeply possible spaces where Afro-pessimism and black feminism meet — sidelong glances and fighting words and all. Their brave and brilliant contributions hold black feminism’s fugitive demands to undo the world and Afro-pessimism’s unflinching turn towards social death in the same frame,¹⁰ to consider the “both/and” of their demands — not towards cathartic and/or recuperative ends, that is to say, *not towards dialectal ends, which can only ever disarm the threat of their interventions, but as a praxis in search of insurgent ground*, which contributor Jaye Austin Williams describes as a different “longitude” for “life and being” that also accounts for “the empirically supportable fact that when blacks survive at all, they must do so with a resolve to resist and protest.” The questions to emerge in and

from these interstitial spaces testify to ruptures of thought, word, and deed activated by the pressure-cooking of Afro-pessimism and black feminism together. But because not all black feminisms are the same, careful readers will notice considerable disagreement over the meaning of black feminisms ranging across and within numerous mutually constituted and relational indexes of the operation of power and violence. This is to be expected in serious research that takes up black feminisms. Attention to Afro-pessimism in this volume is also nuanced. Instead of redeeming or correcting or discarding Afro-pessimism, the contributors demonstrate that there are multiple Afro-pessimisms just as there are multiple black feminisms—some of which are entangled and some of which are deeply antagonistic because of the violence of the social relations of knowledge production itself, and because of the violence of the use of (un/gendered) blackness in the making of the social relations of knowledge production.

While by no means a definitional set of essays on the co-thinking of Afro-pessimism and black feminisms—some Afro-pessimist and black feminist thinkers will find home in these contributions while others will not—the provisional situatedness of these essays within two concepts reveals their promises and limitations when engaged together. This co-thinking offers generative space to engage their promises and limitations without recovering, redeeming, or salvaging Afro-pessimism or making it recuperable. In this introductory essay, we begin to unpack some of these criticisms; yet, while we identify gaps in Afro-pessimisms and their consequences, we do not claim that black feminisms have all the answers. We advise readers to take what they can use from this introduction to help trouble how blackness is reported and presented. Irrespective of this special issue or the critiques offered in this introduction, Afro-pessimisms will surely continue to attract new readers and have a multitude of audiences. We hope that some of those readers will find a generative question-space in this collection of essays—in other words, space to explore tensions and questions that elaborate just as much as they interrogate Afro-pessimisms; and that these readers will be prompted to ask questions like, *What do I do with the way that I was trained and the way that I am moving now? How do Afro-pessimisms alloy that movement, and how do they situate it?*

The collection of essays that make up this volume thus end where another collection might begin: by supplanting the “both/and” of Afro-pessimisms and black feminisms with the “both/and” of gendered racial colonial violence (i.e., the violence of white settler gendered nation-building) and chattel slavery’s gendered racial colonial violence (i.e., the violence of heteropatriarchal humanism and sexual imperialistic world-making). Rather than offer a thin and cursory introduction to each contribution, in this introduction we situate each contribution and model a type of rigorous and arduous inquiry and

detail that only rarely gets accorded to black feminist scholarship and scholarship on black women in political science and political theory.¹¹

We hope that readers will take away from this introduction and the other contributions to this special issue how important a deep and wide literacy as well as intellectual history are for the study of black lived experiences. We attend in this introduction to a politics of citationality and model a commitment to robust and broad historiography that includes black political histories, black cultural histories, black social histories, black histories of knowledge, and black embodied histories that foreground positionality and the terms and conditions under which knowledge was and is produced. *We realize that this approach challenges Afro-pessimism's insistence that the sociality and intellectual frameworks black people create are structurally meaningless and available for destruction – and we have no answer to that fact of blackness.* By politics of citationality, we mean to index deeper literacies in black thought, black poesis, and black praxis that take time to engage, time to become familiar with, and attention to historically-situated political thought. As editors, we assert that we have inherited a tradition of black thought. Sometimes viewed as scattershot remnants and leftovers for others of us, these hard-fought ideas are sumptuous, grand, elaborated principles and ideas that continue to be the rocks, ciphers, hammers, quilts, and map-making tools for undoing the world – if only we will turn towards them. In a powerful statement on citation practices, Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang, and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández ask “Who are you citing, and why do you cite them (and not others)?”¹² This potent question about literacy suggests that a different kind of work might be necessary going forward, if we hope to answer, witness, and deepen our understandings of the urgent and pressing questions within black communities.

Questions and Routes to Consider: The Harness and the Yoke

Taken together, these essays prompt us to ask, *Which Afro-pessimism is being privileged and where? How do we account for the multiplicity of Afro-pessimisms, both in academic and non-academic spaces? How did each of us arrive at black feminism and how did each of us arrive at Afro-pessimism? How does Afro-pessimism help us to intervene in disciplines? What are the stakes of black mothering in black feminism and in Afro-pessimism, and how do these stakes operate to create discarded and unwanted intellectual thought?*¹³ *What draws black feminisms to and away from Afro-pessimism? What draws Afro-pessimism to black feminisms? Under what conditions do scholars read Afro-pessimism at once critically and capaciously in pursuit of black (feminist) freedom dreams? Is Afro-pessimism nothing more than a sadism that derives its pleasure from black suffering? Does Afro-pessimism close the door to black feminist freedom dreams, or does it outfit the fugitive*

demand for black feminist freedom with the ammunition – not the Master’s Tools, but Black Rebellion Codes – to destroy a hetero-patriarchal antiblack world? In what ways is Afro-pessimism’s set of questions different from black feminism’s enduring demands for an anti-racist and anti-sexist “elsewhere and elsewhere”? What has holding this debate and working within this frame cost? And what has been paid, and by whom?

The contributors to this special issue elaborate and explore black feminisms for all the ways in which they have been yoked to Afro-pessimism’s desire to sit with and hold and testify to loss and to mourning; and yet, the writers also invoke the ways in which black feminism’s demand profoundly exceeds the basic precepts of social death which animate Afro-pessimism’s critique. They elaborate racial blackness as a dual condition of feminine hyper-vulnerability and alleged inviolability – and, as a perpetually ungendered anchor through which the white and non-white feminine can make claims – to negotiate not from without but from within those spaces that call themselves Afro-pessimism/are called Afro-pessimist/are yoked by and to Afro-pessimism. Further, the authors featured in this special issue – and we, in this introduction – think hard about how new scholarly tendencies are developed, the labors involved in developing them, and the labors that obscure the salient ground works on which the new stands.

This group of scholars smuggle in citations not (just) to elaborate and/or interrogate Afro-pessimism but sometimes under the sign of Afro-pessimism itself. As filmmaker and critical theorist Kumi James explains,

Perhaps the Negro has been able to enact itself as a “problem for thought” but the black woman will always be a problem for the Negro. We are the problem for thought that goes unthought because we have the potential to undo the white patriarchy that constitutes thought.¹⁴

Because black women are a particularly vexing and “unruly” problem for thought across every scale, the contributors to this volume yoke their interventions to thinkers like Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, and Sylvia Wynter¹⁵ as anchoring voices in black feminism and as *proto*-Afro-pessimists,¹⁶ indeed, as some of the most important scholars to inaugurate the questions that our authors wrestle with under the sign of Afro-pessimism. Their citation practices suggest that Afro-pessimism’s “unflinching paradigmatic analysis”¹⁷ is birthed from the im/possibility of black feminism’s fugitive demand. That is to say, while Afro-pessimists describe their intervention as a variation of black feminism, as Frank B. Wilderson III does, black feminism theorizes black sociality and relationality *independent of* social death; indeed, black feminism demands to undo the world independent of

Afro-pessimism. This suggests that the relationship between Afro-pessimism and black feminism is, as even Wilderson avers, one-directional. Black feminism is not tethered to Afro-pessimism; rather, Afro-pessimism is tethered to black feminism. More to the point, and to speak plainly: Afro-pessimism and black feminism do not crash into each other; rather, Afro-pessimism crashes into black feminism, sometimes, at black feminism's peril. The intellectual labor of black women and scholars in deciphering the meaning of gender in black complicates the fact of Afro-pessimism as a site antagonistic to collectivity and as a site antagonistic to building shared projects. Our authors—and we, in this introduction—thus wrestle with the isolated requirements and peculiar gendered burdens born by those whose writing constitutes academic Afro-pessimism.

Some of the authors included herein have been drawn to Afro-pessimism because it seemed like a theoretical meeting place where being a token black could be interrupted, and a meeting place where blackness in all its complexity could be theorized, and a meeting place that would actually hold space for mourning injuries to black bodies without being chastised as self-indulgent. Having created a loose and geographically overlapping scholarly community of self-reflective brilliant black feminists who could collaborate from time to time while not requiring each other to share all of the same political commitments seemed, to us, plausible and important. Other contributors explain that they were drawn to Afro-pessimism because of its clear-eyed resistance to respectability politics—its insistence that black people do not and will not fit in this society. For Afro-pessimism, there is not enough civilizing, dressing well, protesting, waiting it out, or speaking properly to escape anti-blackness in the world. As Zenzele Isoke's reading of Hortense Spillers' "speaking flesh" explains, "traditional epistememes...figure our blackness as a something-to-be-cured, -corrected, or -neatly-packaged in service to disciplinarity—or worse, silo-ed into spatial-temporal and categorical paradigms that entomb the profundity of our brokenness." In the face of the liberation narratives that work to shroud this truth and to fight our entombment, anti-blackness does not simply go away but is the perennial anchor for the world that must be undone.

The questions and provocations in these essays ask us to examine how black feminism's many horizons exceeds Afro-pessimism's. Not only this; the contributors demonstrate that the category of "social life" philosophies may be far better described as *philosophies of black demands that the world be undone*. How and why this wide-ranging body of thought has been eclipsed and reduced to something called "social life" is a project for another group of scholars. But it is worthwhile, for certain, to point to the process by which this sleight of hand has occurred to institutionalize Afro-pessimism, as a variant of a body of

theories about social death—perhaps even, as a hegemonic academic and evangelical social project.

Positionalities: Hallucinating Whiteness, Finding Afro-pessimism, Shadee’s Reflection

My cisgender, brown, and entirely human subjectivity has no place in the debates surrounding Afro-pessimism—least of all, in the black feminisms that claim to be pained by Afro-pessimism. I know this, and yet, I intrude in spaces that call themselves/are called Afro-pessimistic, and use their interlocutions of black feminist texts to inform how and what I write in academic and public spaces, about nonblack differences, because I feel that I must. Because Afro-pessimism’s critique, which would be impossible without the contemporary black feminist arguments of *proto*-Afro-pessimists like Hortense Spillers and Saidiya Hartman—to say nothing of the canonical black feminisms of Ida B. Wells¹⁸ and Audre Lorde,¹⁹ which cohere Afro-pessimist claims about the antiblackness of world-making—is profound. Afro-pessimism locates the answers that I have sought for as long as I can remember about my human and gendered person, and about the way the world—that must be undone—works, and about my positionality in it.

As a child of Iranian immigrants in a white, conservative suburb, and later, at a predominantly white university—in a liberal political arena that accommodated Alt-Right sentiments²⁰—I existed on the outside peering in, never fully disavowing the fantasy that I might one day be counted as a proper subject of Euro-American historiography and, thus, human world-making. My research in Afro-pessimism is a personal and political labor to abandon this fantasy. It is dedicated now, as it has always been, to my maternal grandmother, who passes into the spirit realm as I write this. It is she who cared for me in the days and nights in which my single mother worked to make it possible for her three children to live hand to mouth, but with access to elite public schools, in Orange County, California. It was my grandmother who cultivated the sensitive person I was becoming, in the days and nights in which I was eager to find myself but couldn’t in the sanitized, white suburb where the good public schools but terrible people lived. She spoke no English and wore hijab, eliciting stares and sneers from neighbors and classmates who wrote her—and I, as her kin—into being not as an agent with the power to affect history, but as its artifact. I was just beginning to understand how their perceptions of my grandmother hailed me (hail me, still) when, one day in kindergarten, my white five-year-old neighbor—I thought, friend—gave me an ultimatum: she would thereafter extend her friendship on the condition that I stop speaking Persian and dissociate from my grandmother. She further asked that I dye my hair blonde so that I could be ‘beautiful’,

and that I bring ‘normal’ foods to school. Desperate not for her friendship but for the whiteness her bargain offered—a desperation responsible for great shame in the adult I have become, and especially, for the melancholy with which I write and speak—I agreed, and diligently worked to effect those changes that I could.

My grandmother’s was the bosom I called home, but for two excruciating days and nights, I neither spoke Persian to nor acknowledged her—when she walked me to school, when she fed me, when she bathed me, when she put me to sleep, when she held me, when she loved me. And I did this, it was clear, even (especially) to the five-year-old who enacted this betrayal, because I was too ashamed to love myself, to love her, and to claim where I came from. More to the point, I did this precisely because there was a correlation, I sensed, at age five and still, between the hue and hairiness of my skin(folk), the foods of my motherland, the language of my mother tongue, and my humanness—the latter, always suspect, a suspicion communicated in schoolyard descriptions of my person as an “it”. So regularly was I hailed as “it”, even if only as a conflictual relationship with white Americans, that I did not recognize myself the first time a classmate used she/her/hers pronouns to describe me. The objectification with which I identified as a child inflects not just the performativity of my present-day passing-white brownness, but also and especially of my gendered performativity. Which is to say, perhaps the only reason that I know myself as cisgender is because I intentionally crafted such a person as the corrective to this “it”. Especially during my four years at university, I hyper-sexualized myself in an attempt to cohere a gender identification that would testify to my humanity. Indeed, my cisgender performativity has always been a bid to know my body—not black but brown, and anyways, hairy, porous, and disgusting—as human. It wasn’t until graduate school (really, until reading Frantz Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks*) that I learned why humanism is a ruse—more to the point, that the pathology or abjection assigned to people of color and/as objects is inessential to the being of that person/object but rather a comment on the irredeemable pathology of humanism as a political and (as) libidinal project that overdetermines our epistemological totality to name a person’s/object’s ontological coordinates.²¹ I also learned in graduate school, in study and community with black radical thinkers, that my dehumanization is contingent and intermittent and entirely dependent on the continuous and structural inhumanity of racially black people. Or, as the Combahee River Collective taught us in their black feminist statement,²² well before Afro-pessimism had an argument about which to speak: the freedom of all oppressed peoples depends entirely on the freedom of black women, which we might extrapolate to include black queer and trans persons, who are exceptionally made “it” in humanist discourse. If the racially black person

is ontologically objectified, as Fanon teaches us and Afro-pessimists remind us, and if in that making-object black people are not—as contributors to this special issue Patrice D. Douglass and Selamawit D. Terrefe elaborate—*engendered* but rather *ungendered*, then we must think about/with black objectification to elaborate the making-gender that follows (in the second instance) from the racialization that happens in the first instance. Of this much, I am certain.

I am still in the process of figuring out the rest, and struggling to do so without making myself a caricature of the sycophant that so many students of Afro-pessimism have been reduced to. It has been a surprise to me, perhaps as much as to those people who have mentored me, that I found the pen for the melancholic disposition with which I negotiate my being-in-the-world, indeed, with which I interrogate without transcending this melancholy—so that I might live *in it*, in a way that I couldn't, or refused to do so as a young child eager to know myself as white—first, in black feminism, and then, in Afro-pessimism. It has always been clear to me that the questions pertaining to my sex and gender are secondary, or perhaps, overdetermined by the contingent and intermittent nature of my racial differences. So conditional is the coloredness of my body and my person that I could meet the structural adjustment demanded by my 'friend'. I have also always suspected that the question of how and why my racial differences cohere (or don't) is inevitably a question for space and time—or, History—but I did not understand the significance of this connection until I read *Black Skin, White Masks* and then, Afro-pessimist interlocutions of Fanon's text, as well as Afro-pessimist arguments against hegemonic revisionisms more generally.²³ As I write about in my contribution to this volume and about which I've written elsewhere,²⁴ what appeals to me most—on a conscious level—about this Afro-pessimism is that it elaborates the metaphysical constraints of space, time, and ontological im/possibility, staying with the "tear in the world"²⁵ that makes and sustains human be(com)ing. Its critical re-readings of black feminisms serve to enumerate how the distinction—the imposed distance—between a human body and the flesh of the human's Other function as a "racial calculus" and/or "political arithmetic"²⁶ to distribute and arrange the human's "-isms" across space and time. It is thus my position that this Afro-pessimism evinces rather than obstructs the nuances, inconsistencies, tensions, and contradictions of even or especially nonblack differences.

Perhaps more to the point, Afro-pessimism elucidates the psycho-somatic symptoms of being-in-the-world as a being-*in-time*. Its critical interlocution of Fanon's trans-disciplinary text has made it possible for me to think more robustly about the manufacture of gender, sexuality, and nonblack racialization—in addition, dis/ability and coloniality—with particular attention to the psyche. Further, its use

as pedagogy²⁷ enables for my students a serious engagement with the subconscious as structure — or, in theory-speak, with the libidinal economy of humanist world-making, as it is symptomized by political economic antiblackness — modeling for students a vigilant critique of the human and his (pluralized, feminine) others, of the cognitive schema and its mappings, and of the psychoanalytic processes that make identity and difference, in my Critical Identity Studies classroom. To put it plainly, this Afro-pessimism has made it possible for me to teach black and nonblack students alike how to hold the abstract and the particular, the “both” and the “and” in the same frame, and to unflinchingly consider what is possible in this world and what is impossible, requiring resources that might exist outside of the human’s frame.

Positionalities: Accused of Social Life — Modeling Self-Critical Inquiry, Tiffany’s Reflection

I went to college knowing already about graduate school and seeing it as a way out of my family’s middle-class dreams of dutiful respectability for us through me. After reading the books my grandmother and parents had, professor Rose Butler Browne’s autobiography *Love My Children* (1969), and Haywood Patterson’s *Scottsboro Boy* (1969), while listening to womanish details in the hair salon at around age eleven, I decided that I would also write such accounts of black worlds. Because of an assortment of garden variety Clinton Era tragedies reserved for black families and especially for black single mothers and grandmothers, I reserved every waking hour at high school and college for figuring out how to repair: 1) the injuries that came from the institutionalized spectacle of social divestment in black people — a cruel backlash to Civil Rights and Black Power, and 2) the intramural violence we used to cope with the racial politics of being *Sethe’s children* — all of us. If I am being honest, these “garden variety” forms of slow violence were normalized in ways that make them profoundly painful to address even now as contemporary black movements insist that elected officials must be made to pay a high price for their contributions to this toxic social milieu and its cross-generational horror. Many of us are only just learning how to feel and to experience all the death-dealing that these laws and policies enacted. My generation and the ones before us inevitably made mistakes in order to survive a tremendously violent world but, we also survived, quite intentionally, being *the promised ones*, “young, gifted, and black” with our “souls intact” as Nina Simone had guaranteed on her album *Black Gold* (1969). We survived by searching for each other and fighting every fight we could. I found Black Studies — a field that I did not have to create — because it provided countless social, structural, institutional, spiritual, aesthetic, visual, performative, and historical answers for why the Clinton Omnibus Bill,

and the Clinton Welfare Reform Bill, and the English Only Movement, and the crack epidemic, and HIV/ AIDS, and structural adjustment, and massive city-wide/region-wide unemployment, and failed decolonization were used to punish black populations, sell broadcast news, and sell local and transnational heteropatriarchal black leaders to us. And under cover of night I began doctoral education in 1995 in a field that was not Black Studies because admissions do not always go like we want them to and because I couldn't find the graduate formations and funding where it was being practiced in an institutionalized way and because Cedric Robinson said "yes" and "we can grow something more here, with this one," or something like that. Though promised, a soon to happen free-standing autonomous Ph.D. in Black Studies at University of California, Santa Barbara, never came. But TA-ing as a graduate student in Black Studies providing training that I received and that I stole—the three graduate seminars, the target of opportunity tenure-track black lesbian faculty mentor in another department, the lecturers with D.Phils who gave decades teaching undergraduates Black Studies and trained their Teaching Assistants on the side. In my context, in a graduate program that was not Black Studies we mostly had a Women of Color framework and a set of shared political agreements that eschewed capitalism, nationalism, and imperialism. Though no one in my intellectual formation sneered too hard at me for wanting to re-launch the Black Graduate Student Association (not what I would call a political organization) as a monthly lecture series or to attend a local black church, they certainly were ok with me bearing the burden of navigating multiple not contiguous and antagonistic ways of being. They kind of understood that my position in blackness was quite different than theirs but we didn't talk too much about that since everybody was also doing Black Studies and often had a different Black Studies canon than me. I hung back and just focused on learning, as a nerdy girl from another part of the country who had to build the intellectual historical linkages to the field that was not Black Studies—to insist on Black knowledge in Political Science—because though many people had dreamed it, life and time and institutional racism and jealousy and meritocracy and elitism prevented that PhD in Black Studies from ever materializing, though there is a PhD emphasis certificate that now can be earned. The Black Studies graduate training existed in the spaces that we made it—*sans* certification and formal graduate seminars.

Three jobs into my life as a Black Studies professor, I was offered a research-one job at the University of California, Irvine, where the prevailing ideology and theoretical account of black revolution was Afro-pessimism and the cohort of graduate scholars being groomed were Afro-pessimists. And the field of dreams cohort that I thought I would someday go to school with didn't emerge until I brought my

colleagues from around the country to a conference of the Association for the Study of Black Women in Politics to UC Irvine in May 2016.²⁸ It was the second Black Studies conference I worked on with others to convene in the University of California system.

I had to make peace with the fact that, having arrived at Irvine preferring Gargi Bhattacharyya's account of slavery and colonialism over Hortense Spillers' (who taught at my undergraduate school but who no black students or students of color that I ever knew ever worked with—we knew Harryette Mullen, Ndri Assie Lumumba, Sandra Greene, and Anne Adams in literature and history and expressive culture, because you just had to know them to survive), I caused some amount of disquiet. So, I missed the deep conversation with Spillers that animated folks at Irvine. And, I had only been thinking about and citing Saidiya Hartman's chapter "Seduction and the Ruses of Power" in the transnational women of color framework in which it was published in *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalism, Transnational Feminisms, and the State*.²⁹ Hartman's insights about the life of enslaved women rang true along with other gendered and raced colonial histories of the black world published at the same time. I interpreted Hartman's *Lose Your Mother* as part of a sub-genre of diaspora-disavowing texts that are part of the study of race in international affairs and blackness and immigration and critiques of citizenship and belonging. Not teaching Hartman and Spillers in the ways that others at Irvine were compelled Afro-pessimist graduate students to bring their very best, and most challenging, and hardest questions to my seminars on Blackness and immigration (as projects of making mutually constituted racialized and gendered citizenship)—and subsequently anything else that I taught or contrived or convened or led—and to deconstruct my syllabi in other "more important" seminars; and sometimes to even tell me off to my face, accusing me of something they called 'social life'. And then I read them (Spillers and Hartman together—the appropriate texts) and shared what I learned with students and volunteered to welcome guests at an annual campus scholarship dinner for black students, giving each of the 500 entrants a highlighted copy of "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987), Spillers' most widely-read essay. And I was part of hosting Spillers twice when she visited Irvine and began to cite Hartman dutifully, after I realized how I could be in the published conversation with her beyond my concerns with migration³⁰ and began to think about after-lives transnationally in terms of the "after-lives of apartheid"³¹ in contradistinction to the calls for a new post-racial, post-apartheid approach to the study of culture. Along the way, I invited those graduate students to grow their own teaching philosophies and portfolios by lecturing on Spillers in my classes and gave them the space to *un-teach my course* content in their discussion sections and in fugitive

moments actually contributed to events that the graduate students invited me to participate in. And, I helped some people without them knowing it, because I have never been into the contemplative life so much that I believed in unemployed PhDs in what would have been degrees in political theory—if the discipline wasn't so anchored by white supremacist knowledge production. And I am sure that others helped me without me knowing it, too. And I wrote a book and many articles and made friends fugitive style—*temporary and on an as-needed basis*—and then was sometimes dismissed grandly and finally began to train my own students and teach graduate seminars and identify promising students for graduate school and become a different kind of more systematic and thoughtful mentor. And I became a mother. And midyear when this special issue was being developed through the publication process, riding high on “I survived, I m/othered, I know what it means to be shunned in the middle of a ‘shared’ political project” I had to ask a woman of color Afro-pessimist to co-guest edit this special issue with me because I needed her help and bad to see this thing through to the end. But, the writing process has taught me that I do not want to fight Afro-pessimism and all its contradictions. I want to answer my own questions whether loved or hated. And I know my relationship to it is over now because now I think I will know how to walk away the next fifty times a scholar from someplace on the planet hears about my affiliation with Irvine and begins to query me about this brand-new field, Afro-pessimism, like they are pining for a selfie with Derrida's remains. The journey to editing this account of Black Feminism and Afro-pessimism has made me not care and has revealed all of the things that I did to survive the intramural violence that Afro-pessimism constitutes in my eyes as a knowledge project.

To put it plainly, we have asked our authors to inhabit this meeting place of Afro-pessimism and black feminism because it reveals how the marshaling of black women's position, creativity, and labor can inaugurate any new field of operation and can extend any new terrain of possibility at the same time that it grandly ushers these same bodies into long-term harm.

An Invitation to Be Eaten:³² A Disciplinary Caveat

When the invitation came to convene and guest edit a special issue of *Theory & Event*, it did not at first seem to be a great opportunity. Given the demographics of the discipline, political theory as it is practiced in higher education and the likely readership of this journal, and the others producing academic political theory, this volume is likely to replicate the same uneven power relation that the contributors are punished by and analyze herein. Not only this, because of these demographic concerns, the contributors are likely to create an intramural

spectacle for white political theorists who are dabbling in black thought on the heels of Black Lives Matter and Say Her Name and Fees Must Fall and Black Alliance for Just Immigration and Undocu-Black and the outcry against the sale of East and West African migrants trying to reach Europe in Libya at slave auctions and the two decades of silence against this under-reported slow catastrophe, as movements that have captured and disproved national and international narratives about racial justice and social progress. Becoming a spectacle for these readers means being responded to with disdain, cruel humor, uninformed comments, and generalized dishonor. Witness comments to a 2017 job posting for The Institute for Gender, Sexuality, and Feminist Studies at McGill University in Montreal, Canada. The post invited:

applications for a joint-appointed, tenure track assistant professor position in Feminist, Gender and/or Sexuality Studies with an emphasis on Social Justice. The successful candidate will hold a joint appointed position in the Institute for Gender, Sexuality and Feminist Studies as well as either the Department of Sociology or the Department of Political Science, according to their profile. Candidates must demonstrate outstanding research potential and publication records, a record of graduate training in the disciplines of Sociology or Political Science and Women's/Gender Studies, substantial and relevant teaching experience or potential, and a strong commitment to interdisciplinary inquiry and the support of diverse intellectual communities. We seek candidates who value diversity and whose research, teaching and service bear this out. The hiring committee welcomes applications from qualified candidates working in critical approaches to intersectionality and social justice. We particularly welcome candidates whose work addresses any of the following areas: indigenous studies, post-colonial studies, race and/or ethnicity, disability, trans* studies, sexuality and queer research, social inequalities or social movements.³³

Comments to the job post from self-described political theorists on a resource website created by political theorists, who are themselves largely under-represented and discounted in the discipline of political science, include: "What kind of dumbass will they end up getting. One lacking a y chromosome;" and, "Wow, reading that was like being stabbed by giant black dildos in every orifice at once. This shouldn't even be legal;" and, "There's a whole circus of crazier leftists out there. Like that woman in Canada who wore latex prostitute outfits in her lectures;" and, "I heard they couldn't find someone who 'identified by gender neutral pronouns';" and, "I feel like I got stupider just by reading that advertisement."³⁴ Here, our colleagues – people who generally do not like the type of scholarly contributions in this special issue and who have deeply transphobic, homophobic, and anti-black responses

to feminism, gender, sexuality, social justice, interdisciplinary inquiry, social inequalities, social movements, race, and diverse intellectual communities—show us their unfiltered reactions to exactly the kind of work black feminisms and Afro-pessimisms attempt. Indeed, such persons—political theorists—imagine that our research questions and, more to the point, our bodies exist to do sexualized injury to them.

Political Theory in particular carries a particularly heavy burden of complicity with unethical scholarly conduct, because like other sub-fields in political science it, too, alleges that it has no black scholarly history.³⁵ This means that Black Political Theory scholars and Race and Ethnic Politics scholars working on theoretically significant topics are regularly advised that nobody in their department teaches about or knows anything about the entirety of the black world. Because of this erasure, the audience of this special issue will be innocently drawn into Afro-pessimism as if it was not anticipated by, preceded by, or engaged with by anybody before those writing about black political thought in the 2000s. Indeed, Afro-pessimism will be presented in the wider discipline through an inevitable tokenizing gesture, more proper to branding, marketing, and commodification of the new, as the only kind of blackness and black thought available to those younger scholars who might have questions about black anything and everything. Any of the contributors to this special issue would be among the scholars that would be a candidate for the kind of position posted in this advertisement, and thus, subject to the kind of ad hominem attacks that the comments—from future colleagues, presumably—evidence.

Instead of the heights of academic stardom, what came to mind after receiving the invitation to edit this special issue was cultural critic Greg Tate's (mother's) words about the pleasure that can be derived by white people from being party to conversations and debates within black communities. Taking on this project meant that Afro-pessimism and black feminism would be shared as thought experiments with the largely white audience of the journal. Both of these tendencies in black thought are distinctive intellectual products created by black communities to solve internal problems. Yet, with this audience and this journal "everything but the burden" would be absconded with/gifted, leaving black thinkers with the mess and pain of the enduring questions, exposed.³⁶ Given these caveats, editing this special issue also had the potential to create a site for new thinking for all of us who are compelled to traffic within these two concepts. Keeping in mind Toni Morrison's "playing in the dark"³⁷ and its call against all of the disciplines, on the one hand, and Saidiya Hartman's call to challenge the ethics of the spectacle, on the other hand, wherein white masculine and white feminine solidarity with black suffering results in empathy only if black suffering can be made into a white leisure activity, a white site of commodification, and a white site of clever displacement

of material and real black suffering by imagined white suffering — we entered into this conversation with extreme care.³⁸

This is the genealogy of this invitation, the political project of this work, even as it carries all the ramifications of what it means to make pain a visible performance for people outside of the project while at the same time doing the real work of liberation.

Mama's Babies

The radical potential of the word 'mother' comes after the 'm'. It is the space that 'other' takes in our mouths when we say it. We are something else. We know it from how fearfully institutions wield social norms and try to shut us down. We know it from how we are transforming the planet with our every messy step toward making life possible.

Alexis Pauline Gumbs³⁹

If, as these essays evince, black feminist interventions anticipate Afro-pessimism's word, then we might consider that Afro-pessimism's and black feminism's is an intramural meditation-deliberation best held on the move. Its custodians are runaways whose collectivity is made — built from traditions of experimentation, truth-telling, and disciplined and systematic reflection — by the black women, specifically, by the black "m/other"⁴⁰ who multiplies its house of resistance.⁴¹ At the same time as we do not endeavor to reify motherhood, we must wrestle with the fact that whether or not black production/reproduction creates motherhood and what that status means is an essential question for the making and sustaining of blackness.

Because black mothering guarantees the coming of unruly and rebellious *promised ones* that accompany each other, marking each other's lives, black (not *motherhood* but⁴²) *mothering* and the black "womb" emerge in these essays as a primary theme, as the harbinger of an insurgent horizon always in the making — an elsewhere and elsewhere that is the site of black feminism's demand to end the world *and* Afro-pessimism's call for "the social life of social death."⁴³ We mean to clarify that m/othering is most certainly not the same thing as black feminism but, as we think about the production of black knowledge and black sociality, for these contributors the stakes of black mothering as a socially reproductive technology of knowledge-making is a central terrain. The black "m/other" is not the archetype of Freud's paranoia — of Oedipus, the law of the father, and phallocentrism. Instead, she symptomizes what Christina Sharpe describes in *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Duke University Press, 2010) as the "Corregidora Complex." This m/other tends to the memory of racial slavery and

engenders generations of witnesses who will testify to its horrors, even/especially as she continues to live them herself. “Corregidora,” Sharpe explains, “allows us to explore how the family’s demands on the subject to keep visible (but also keep repressed) horrific experiences of violence in slavery...become congruent with the law of the (slave) master.” That is to say, Corregidora indexes “the ‘proximity between antagonism and identification’ in the demand” that black women “keep visible and [...] reproduce evidence of slavery’s violence”⁴⁴ in the “constellation of desires”⁴⁵ attendant to what contributor Tiffany Lethabo King describes as the violence of “the family” — a particularly antiblack model for sociality and intimacy “that [includes], in addition to patriarchy and incest, miscegenation and slavery.”

Such are the innumerable examples that demonstrate that black m/othering does not simply enter the symbolic world of the father and his laws but that it is always shaped by this world; the most potent of these examples being the legacy of *The Moynihan Report* (1965). Turning to that report and the ways that it rebuked black revolution struggles of its day (including the black women’s movement for welfare rights and the black women’s movement against sexual violence) is absolutely necessary if we are to understand the *garden variety* Clinton-era tragedies reserved for Black families in the post-Civil Rights-era and the intramural violence marshaled to cope with them. Simply put, *The Moynihan Report* articulated how the future of black mothering even in the late twentieth century-age of black revolution was to be treated as brutally as histories past of black mothering. As a public policy document meaning to articulate a philosophy or a worldview, Moynihan’s account is a partisan intervention lobbying for a different set of criteria and a different analysis of the civil rights legislation and federal resources that should be made available for his chosen favored charity: black people. But, Moynihan’s choice of language — “tangle of pathology” — is a revealing demand for intimacy with and a pejorative description of braided social words that he could not actually figure out or control. Moynihan’s tone sounds like that of a jilted lover publishing revenge-porn because the diaries at Monticello and whatever other plantations he’d visited perhaps made him believe that black womanhood was an unprotected pleasure cove awaiting his explorations. Like the awards granted to him for public service named after Thomas Jefferson, Moynihan’s work reminded his contemporaries of that other statesman who also had a very public familiarity with black family life. Somebody’s braided and woven lives had been spied on and observed. Somebody opened the door to some survey takers because they thought, perhaps, here was the short-term answer to immediate prayers, only to find out that the devalued scraps and bits of kitchen that they knotted and plaited into livable lives had been deemed by an angry wannabe-paramour social scientist as an impenetrable jungle to

be pacified. The lengths he'd gone to and the things he'd sacrificed had not yielded any easy answers—so to hell with all of them! Moynihan's views on how to exterminate black women's organized ability to shape the public sphere had to do with creating grateful dutiful citizens of the nation. But, he was frustrated by the inability to create such subjects despite assigning shame, surveillance, and misery to their survival strategies. Even/especially when the state—and its defenders in social science—impose(s) upon black relationality and calls itself a “member of the family,” black people cannot be tricked into relying, trusting, and depending on the state. Moynihan thus produced policy and legislation that profoundly articulated with the function of antiblack gender ideologies in state and society; his work offered up the black m/others who manage loose, untethered black “family” relationships as the scapegoats for slavery's afterlife—for the violence of state and civil society as well as vigilante actors.

They were impenetrable after all, these autonomous black people without a couch to faint on, as women who valued relationality to other women over that with any men, who walked beside and often far in front of men in the public sphere, who gave as good as they got, who raised sons that danced and played guitar and wrote poetry and who raised daughters who were political party operatives, trade unionists, engineers, and business leaders and who danced and played guitar and wrote poetry, too. These were women who publicly criticized black masculinist and heteropatriarchal politics and the very notion of the family for its nationalism and propertyism, explaining the ways that masculinism, heteropatriarchy, and the family destroyed black people's lives. These women cared far less about who or what you were and far more that you, simply, were. Who were these black women—m/others—and how did they survive having spurned Moynihan's friendship, his tutelage, and his devoted scopophilia? Following Moynihan's black female contemporaries, contributor Tiffany Lethabo King rejects the experts (i.e., Moynihan and the epistemological and institutional horse he rode in on) and their will to knowledge/will to govern by tracing the ways in which the black matriarch as a social force “[renders] oneself unknowable, or unrepresentable and therefore impenetrable within dominant scientific and social discourses.” Insisting on being unknowable, “beyond redemption,” “unruly”, and “disorganized” in all stages and corners of her life—inside the womb, at the kitchen table, and out in the streets (on fire, too)—the black matriarch produces an “anti-property existence” that is a frontal attack on the concept of the family. One can almost hear a litany of disappointed questions posed by Moynihan and his contemporaries, including Orlando Patterson,⁴⁶ from beyond the grave: How dare these black women not love Moynihan and seek him to broker refuge and cover for them? How dare they not worship him given

who they were and the wombs they came from? In all of their “glorious queer failure”⁴⁷ and “revolting”⁴⁸ habits and lifeways, these “aberrations in black”⁴⁹ had no shame and could not be made to disavow or dishonor their promiscuous “other-Mothering” and “play cousin” relations and movement commitments and the theoretical, ethical, and economic import of those relations. Those m/others conjured these aberrations from scratch, creating the intellectual genealogies that would outfit them for the journey of a career on the high seas—in the “wake,” as Christina Sharpe describes it⁵⁰—of black relationality.

Relying on caricatures of the black m/other and intentionally failing to offer real analytical heft to the black masculine and the positionality of both in the national or global economy, Moynihan’s *War on Poverty* was lifted from its context in gendered racial segregation and praised for the work that black women (in the National Welfare Rights Organization) and other working class, poor, and economically stigmatized women had done in their own fight to shape policies and ideas about economic justice in this country. Moynihan’s violent account erased black women’s movement politics via pathologizing black women and men, through demanding that poor women should not be autonomous from patriarchy, and through insisting that black women should be prohibited from survival strategies that enabled them to extricate themselves from patriarchy’s social force—or, to use Premilla Nadasen’s elegant phrasing, through insisting “that poor women should not have access to a source of income independent from men.”⁵¹

Moynihan and other such “Friends of the Negro” reign because they claim to know more and know better about how to organize black life. If, as Jared Sexton exhorts, “[We] better understand white peoples’ fantasies, because tomorrow they’ll be legislation,”⁵² then Moynihan’s public policy contributed to legacies of knowledge production by the plantocracy and its descendants—what contributor Tiffany Willoughby-Herard describes elsewhere as the “slavery-foundation nexus” and a “planter-philanthropy legacy.”⁵³ Defined formally, this relation unsettles the knowledge, cultural, and social scientific “claims made by the older philanthropic organizations to have a special purchase on how to promote and organize society by dint of being founded by wealthy people and through their familiarity with the management of slaves in the Americas and [the rest of] the colonial world. Such leaders dedicated to the uplift of the descendants of slaves were in effect the descendants of the former captains of the industry in slaves.”⁵⁴

Offering another example of *The Moynihan Report’s* lasting influence, Monique Morris clarifies in *Pushout: The Criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (The New Press, 2016) that the “archetypal” features of the pathologized and hated black matriarch are deployed as jus-

tifications to punish the curiosity, expressed needs, and innate intelligence and creativity of black girls in schools. Under the regime of myths about black matriarchy, black girls are accused of having bad attitudes, having sexually-nasty and prematurely-grown bodies, and having anti-feminine domineering ways instead of being seen as beloved and precious and as worthy inhabitants of a planet in which their own thoughts and autonomy are at stake. At school, black girls learn the regimens of devaluation⁵⁵ and the terms upon which they will be (de)valued, and are quickly driven from the public humiliation of the schoolhouse — one of our first entrees into the nature of pseudo-democratic practice in this society — to the public informal economies of sex work and youth detention. In each instance, they are subject to fulfilling the gaze, desire, and pleasure of a society that understands itself in many ways through relation to caricatures of failed or disastrous black m/othering or blackness (un)gendered. Material subjection at its best, they become entrapped in racialized labor and libidinal and pharmaceutical markets. This is the process through which little black girls are being made fit for the world that must be undone. The world literally must be undone in order for them to be able to claim their innocence, youth, vulnerability, and fierce autonomy. King's contribution attends — and the whole of this special issue does, too — to all of these structural impediments to black demands for alternative models of relationality and sociality, especially for black girls-cum-women who seek a life of their own making. Understanding the lives of black girls at school makes the continued significance of Moynihan and his contemporary critics crystal clear: they continue to teach us the internalized biopolitical lessons about the slave relation, which is a relation that cannot be undone until the world is.

If we take our cue from this set of ideas about black mothering and those in Alexis Pauline Gumbs' rendering of the revolutionary black "m/other," then black mothering is

the name [we give to] that nurturing work, that survival dance, *worked* by enslaved women who were forced to breastfeed the children of the status mothers while having no control over whether their birth or chosen children were sold away. Mothering is a form of labor *worked* by immigrant nannies...who mothered wealthy white kids in order to send money [home]. ...Mothering is *worked* by chosen and accidental mentors who agree to support some growing unpredictable thing called future. Mothering is *worked* by house mothers in ball culture who provide spaces of self-love and expression for/as queer youth of color in the street.⁵⁶

Black m/othering in Gumbs' summation and as the authors featured here imagine the task is not a being but a *doing* — not a reified figure

but a set of practices of meditation, invocation, reflection, and self-undoing that also crafts the demand for self-love, dignity, fighting back in the face of real danger, and unpredictable but acknowledged sacred and utterly profane queerness. This m/othering makes something that profoundly exceeds the terms and conditions placed on the mother's reproductive functioning—something intangible and occult and world-destroying. As a process, it effaces those who do it in order to *make something*. And all of the self-care in the world cannot repair this erasure of the self. As contributor Zenzele Isoke further elaborates in her included essay, the work of black m/othering is ungendered and ungendering because

to mother—male, female, both/neither, it doesn't matter—is a verb not a noun. It is not confined to the possession of a vagina; it refers to the capacity to carry a womb. Womb: a Black, unseen place that generously offers itself up to the body, mind, and spirit of unborn ghost. The womb gives life to that which is absent, yet present nonetheless—it *makes something out of everything*. The womb—the Blackest mother—is the birthplace of the history of ideas.⁵⁷

This black m/othering loves us and marks us in spite of the fact that we are not all or only hers to claim, because as a practice it has no legally protected or discursively respected rightful claim to even/especially its own progeny. While black *motherhood* reproduces a slave economy and property relations, black m/othering births the soldiers who unmake the slave economy and property relations. Black m/othering is the site of “the slave's...[and] our collective freedom dreams,” as M. Shadee Malaklou explains in her contribution to this special issue. Black m/othering summons revolutions from whatever sites she has commandeered for her making; she sits you down, makes you—as DeCristo exhorts—listen to “*the sound of being in-relation to loss*.” In DeCristo's figuration, “loss” is not the defeatism of nothingness but the im/possibility of infinity, of a black life that “[resounds] in the silence of the generic ear of the social”—and that matters. As contributors La Shonda Carter and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard further describe, these practices of black m/othering, though standing accused of ruined reproduction and “despite being characterized as being dangerous to [...] children...[decide] that the ‘danger’ [that black m/othering places them] in [is] far less dangerous than the life imagined for [them] by the state.” This m/othering, in the face of being militantly antagonistic to the state, they argue, is “motivated by love, sacrifice, and care—a particularly motherly labor for black liberty.”

**An Anthropology of Afro-pessimism:
 “The Black woman as the arbiter of blackness itself”⁵⁸**

The writers featured in this volume read across multiple fields, disciplines, and/or modes of inquiry and experimentation—black sociality—to figure black m/othering and/or black maternity as one site of fugitive and (as) insurgent generativity. While some elaborate and/or intervene in Afro-pessimist and/or black feminist methods and historiographies, others think within and/or against the singular articulators, debates, and (inter)disciplinary debates inaugurated by each theory. For example, contributor Zenzele Isoke stages a powerful methodological intervention in her experimental essay, in which she describes the black performative aesthetic as a “counterstructural aesthetic rooted in black musicality and orality [that has] typically not found [its] way into the poetics used by those who write [about] black social life in the social sciences.” Some contributors think in the abstract about the black m/other while others name her as Korryn Gaines, Margaret Garner, Rosa Lee Ingram, Mamie Till, Anarcha, Lucy, and Betsey, refusing in this naming to occlude the task of black m/othering as a radical and profane—a world destroying—pedagogy. They #sayhername because, as contributor Patrice D. Douglass explains,

Black women are killed and assaulted by police at rates higher than any other group of women. ...Black women are subjected to forms of police violence most often associated with and thought of as only affecting Black men. However, it is far less likely that the cases of Black women become a part of mass public discourse and debate. While the names of a few Black men killed by police in the months preceding Korryn are widely known, their cases commonly discussed, she and other Black women do and did not experience the same public interest.⁵⁹

Other contributors do not write about black women or black m/othering at all; which is to say, in their essays, black women and m/others are conspicuously absent. Rather than write about black women as knowledge producers who “work” new ways of being and knowing, and/or about black mothering as a political undertaking in the context of slavery-made property relations, they invoke and/or are hailed by the spirit of the black m/other, who appears—without a proper name—at those moments in which new im/possibilities emerge from the messy, electric entanglement of Afro-pessimism and black feminism.

All of the writers featured in this volume are located in the academy, at various stages; you will find herein contributions by doctoral students and seasoned scholars alike. Some of them are also active in debates surrounding Afro-pessimism and/or black feminism in non-or quasi-academic spaces like social media, where conversations about

black sociality can be divested from the white academic-speak that too often characterizes our performative utterances, seducing and containing even or especially our most earnest efforts to resist institutionality and disciplinarity in academic spaces. Therein, the contributors speak (write) plainly and personally, and with systematic and careful analyses about the lived experiences of racial blackness. In academic spaces, too – at least, for some – détente with the pacification practices of Afro-pessimism as a branch of academic black thought that deliberately institutionalizes itself as hegemonic knowledge production has created unanticipated spaces for conducting research without being tampered with by the more craven and brutal aspects of white doctoral education and advancement in higher education. Black feminist Afro-pessimist-trained scholars especially have a fierce unwillingness to provide cover for the white social life of the university and its neoliberal transformation through the “mammy work” of civic and community engagement, the “diversity work” of multiculturalism, and all manner of practices H.L.T. Quan describes as being “available” for “servitude.”⁶⁰ When they do choose to make themselves available to students, colleagues, and mentors, they choose mostly freely and make decisions that are unbent and unbowed, as often as possible. Arbitration and détente, indeed, to create intramural hideaways. As DeCristo would have it, they “jazz” Afro-pessimism and black feminism, “seeding affective relations in profoundly unwieldy ways, creating noisy, unrecognizable sounds sowed from overlooked practices of listening.” For many of the contributors, a doctoral education in Afro-pessimism has provided and incites a kind of intellectual autonomy that generic fighting to be left alone to conduct advanced research and writing simply cannot provide – outside of the distinctive spaces where Afro-pessimism is taught and defended. A simple back-of-the-envelope check of the demographics of the professoriate and rising generation of scholars in cultural studies and critical theory programs in the large university systems and private universities of California, for example, suggests that the scholars from Afro-pessimistic directions experience something categorically different from their cohorts at other universities when the former take up blackness, gender, black women, black men, black masculinity and black femininity, and black queerness in ways that implode the disciplinary and institutional investments that would otherwise sequester their studies. The question is obviously larger than the scope of these contributions but it might be posed like this: *Is it only possible to have a long and deeply focused attention on blackness as a graduate student on the West Coast if one is either avoiding the contemporary legacies of slave positionality (paradoxically, by studying the history of revolt) or if one is telling a revamped, seemingly-new story about blackness that coheres unintentionally with white supremacist pro-slavery accounts of blackness as non-humanity? Do those who remember how to revolt, how to study revolt,*

and how to mourn enslavement get to write, and reflect, and research, (and if so, where)? And what about the university as the site of such research in the first place? This kind of Scylla and Charybdis context shapes how blackness is made, embodied, researched, understood – what we read, whether we read, who interprets what we read, and how we read and write and create – under duress.

In addition, difficult questions remain about the institutional labor that makes Afro-pessimism's thought possible. More often than not, black women become the voyagers and scapegoats for this work and receive the institutional ire of the university for the Afro-pessimist research that transpires there. Jaye Austin Williams' contribution offers a useful way to schematize the ongoing predicament of naked abuse and sequestering experienced by some black feminists located in and engaged with the institutional and intellectual questions provoked by Afro-pessimist departments: "How can ground be broken by one whose will to be/act/create/articulate/theorize is rendered both overtly and insidiously incoherent at best, and absent at worst; while the fruits of that action/creation/articulation/theorization are perpetually accumulated and subsumed?" Black feminist faculty and some students within Afro-pessimist departments experience unaccounted for levels of public humiliation and undignified subjection to isolation (i.e., to coercion, shame, silencing, and punishment) while laboring to provide unintentional cover for Afro-pessimism's more obvious intellectual and social errors – for example, the assumptive logic that it alone is concerned with the structural and political making of the world through antiblack violence, or through what Carole Pateman and Charles Mills and rafts of others have described as the global racial and sexual contract.⁶¹ Other errors include the assumption that an attention to the "libidinal economy" has just been discovered by this Afro-pessimism.⁶² Libidinal economy as a framework for analysis is not new to the study of black abjection. In actuality, we have extensive intellectual and social histories that serve as robust critiques of "sexual imitation" and the erotic dimensions of racial imperialism and racial colonialism and racial slavery – most of which are tethered to Western normative family structures and their claims to empirical knowledge. Tiffany Lethabo King's contribution to this volume and Greg Thomas' *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire* (Indian University Press, 2007) provide nuanced accounts of this dangerous nexus. Whether unpacking "the death of white sociology"⁶³ à la Joyce Ladner and her cohorts, or thinking with Roderick A. Ferguson's "nightmares of the heteronormative,"⁶⁴ or learning from Fatima El-Tayeb's analysis of the "peculiar experience of embodying an identity that is declared impossible even though lived by millions,"⁶⁵ accounts of the operations and contestations of sexuality, empire, and the politics of knowledge are critical aspects

of the libidinal economy that Afro-pessimism builds upon and inherits—though typically denies in terms of deep and robust engagement. Whether sexual property becomes transformed into “land” ownership status or “knowledge” ownership status (or both), as Tiffany Lethabo King explains, “the family” as an “organizing unit” of white Western nations legitimates the commodification of black sexualities and energies and legitimates the commodification of everything else as well.

Some of Afro-pessimism’s other errors, like what Frank B. Wilderson III describes as the “ruse of analogy”⁶⁶, have certainly and will certainly continue to be useful. Yet, sometimes the ruse of analogy concept and mode of analysis confuses “imperial multiculturalism” with the function of an informed solidarity politics that effectively coheres with black revolution, and self-consciously calls itself and the political risks that it makes black.⁶⁷ As contributor Greg Thomas, who mines a more robust black intellectual history than perhaps Afro-pessimism’s, explains,

For older and enduring Black radical political-intellectual perspectives, the existence of “anti-Black racism” among non-Black peoples, organizations, and movements is neither a new nor shocking phenomenon. For many Black revolutionary movement logics of the ‘60s and ‘70s, for instance, this fact did not preclude alliance (or the exhaustion of alliances made) or lead to a doctrinaire rejection of “solidarity” work and its international (or “intercommunal”) possibilities.⁶⁸

Other Afro-pessimist claims, like what DeCristo describes as the “‘discovered’ non-sovereignty of the dead and the ‘voiceless,’” which Afro-pessimism’s “certain rendition of black abjection requires in order to hear and to give a hearing to ‘the social,’” are literally the classic definitions of a white supremacy that defines the world through blackness as non-humanity and threat to being, on the one hand, and antiblackness as the normal state of things—which must never be mourned, on the other hand. The signature Afro-pessimist claim that “people of color” as putative racialized immigrants are the only ones to have entered the public sphere via appeals to whiteness and antiblackness belies the Atlantic slave trade’s history of racial imperialism as the history of American racial empire. And anyway, these “people of color” were incorporated into an expanding United States as simply black, no more and no less; recall that until quite recently (i.e., a post-Civil Rights Movement epistemological modernity), the world of slavery and empire had but two categories for race- and nation-building: the rulers and the ruled. Those from ruled nations, despite elaborate racial classification schemes that ranged from nomenclatures like quadroon and octoroon to creole and dougla to Melanesian and Polynesian to

Caribbean and Latino, who “entered” US society before immigration legislation in 1966 did so on terms of subjection and racial imposition/ racial contingency shaped by slavery, forced labor, being viewed as property first/last/and only, the medical plantation, conquest and settlement, and rape. To allow demographic and eugenic fictions to dictate how we tell the story of the inability to secure enforceable anti-lynching law in the 1920s, or the inability to secure enforceable civil rights laws that could survive the 1980s and 1990s backlash against the 1960s is disingenuous. Jim Crow segregation and immigration restriction operate together, indeed, are co-constitutive of national and transnational histories of governance and zeitgeist and racialized liberal progress narratives; they rest on brute force and on the production of gendered whitening (and ungendered blackening). Which is to say, the claim that only non-black people bear the brunt of understanding – and complicity with – the world that must be undone is simply incorrect. *All* of our “questionable relationships to blackness” as Zenzele Isoke describes them, must be examined and in every possible direction. Antiblack death-dealing structures the world through designations of honorary whiteness – for every color including black – and these processes of designation are essential to any account of any part of the world and any attempts to know or to undo the world. Myths about how anti-black violence operates, who is most vulnerable to complicity with it, where the analyses of it come from, the conditions of violence under which it proceeds, and singular accounts of the nature of power are always only partially useful. The range of writing and projects that use Afro-pessimism generatively, as a theory of application and as a theory to pivot away from, reveal that this charge of being too narrow has not stopped black feminist thinkers from marshaling Afro-pessimism to explore things that are actually antagonistic to it. The harder criticism to address is what Greg Thomas describes in his contribution to this volume as “political ideologies based upon...[discrete, monolithic, and monological categories and referents],” which when deployed by Afro-pessimism simply recreate the “traditional ideological history of the West...[via] an internal if damning critique” that “[embodies] and [encourages] pessimism largely from within the established order of knowledge that it analytically engages and categorically replenishes and preserves.” This is what Thomas means by Afro-pessimism as a 2.0 version of white Enlightenment history. All of “us” – black and nonblack alike – have been locked into the ways that neoliberalism (like slavery before it) has redistributed opportunities in a predictable fashion. Non-black peoples of color cannot be the only ones blamed for taking advantage of this spoils system. “We” are complicit with the world that must be undone whether we want to be or not – and perhaps especially because we are positioned as fundamentally antagonistic to it, we know all too well what it means to be sold by skinfolk

who are not our kinfolk, as Zora Neale Hurston explained. To be sure, “we” provide cover for the world that must be undone whether we want to or not—such are the problems of the living dead still enrobed in black flesh and mortal corporeality, even as we disavow the desires to live (i.e., transcend the blackness of flesh) and make common cause with all of the dead. While we are busy belaboring who can be trusted and whose whispered confessions sabotaged the last revolt, in this moment some of us may be simply forgetting to revolt at all. And giving up the ghost—even to become ghosts while we still have black flesh—has consequences.

Contributor Jaye Austin Williams’ many generative Afro-pessimist *and* black feminist insights about: incoherency, absence, accumulation, subsumption, particularity, irreconcilability, living under a wholly unremarkable and thoroughly normalized threat of death, fighting for and not fighting for a non-existent inheritance which is always just beyond our reach and yet which constitutes the rights and status and a “generic...social” that everyone else enjoys, and warnings against—what contributor Jeramy DeCristo describes as—the “imitative economy of black masculinity,” including “ignorance of its own non-sovereignty,” walk us through what the above-mentioned détente looks like, as truly beauty-full and theoretically response-able scholarly writing. Williams’ Afro-pessimist insights are at their most compelling and hardest to digest when we realize that they might just as easily be called 1) the basic features of the position that black feminists seek to comprehend; 2) legion in the world that must be undone and which exists beyond the rarefied zone of official knowledge production in universities/corporations/political parties/government agencies/philanthropies; and 3) common to the world of the intramural making of blackness as a relationality through gender and un-gendering. What is to be done with (black, female) bodies that are always already primarily available for speculation in the world that must be undone, and which acquire value (in the world that must be undone) from being able to reproduce alleged valuelessness—*partus sequitur ventrem*—that is to say, the status of the “child” (i.e., Afro-pessimism) following that of the “m/other” (i.e., black feminism)? This slavery analogy to the relationship between black feminism and Afro-pessimism as systems of knowledge will certainly be challenged but it is what bears to be interrogated in the field of knowledge production. The one thing that we must make extremely clear, however, is that the “child” following the status of the “m/other” in this analogy may be absconding with the m/other’s status and the child’s status and creating a filial relationship that is more imagined than materially or theoretically productive or wanted. This relationship that so many of our contributors anchor their work in may be an evocative and problematic displacement that makes it palatable to conduct certain research on and in black femi-

nism—because the conditions of doing black feminist research have been constricted. When Saidiya Hartman writes, “We carry the mother’s mark and it continues to define our condition and our present,”⁶⁹ it is not clear that the “we” is both black bodies and Afro-pessimism. We might consider historian Jennifer L. Morgan’s renderings⁷⁰ of blackness and antiblackness as conditions that operate through the power, practices, ideas, and language of something called gender to help us to sift through approaches to knowledge production and to the duress under which knowledge, for example, Afro-pessimism’s, is fought for and acquired. Patrice D. Douglass in her contribution to this collection elaborates the role of black women in this labor when she describes “black feminism as both a corrective to the assumptive logic of non-black gender concerns and a theory of violence that expands and challenges the manner in which gendered violence is assumed to appear in the world.” Douglass reasons that “black death, which symbolizes much more than absence” and which “[engages] what is both specific and general about the formulations of antiblack gender violence” is politicized [...] through a genealogy of black feminism.” If, as Morgan’s writings indicate and as the contributions to this volume testify, Afro-pessimism finds the grammar(-that-is-not-one) that it uses to sound out the inarticulateable pain of black suffering as a “hieroglyphics”⁷¹ that it means to etch into the brick and mortar of the university, in that something called gender, specifically, in the ungendering effects of unsignified/unsignifiable black flesh, then *there is no Afro-pessimism*—not just the execution of its ideas but also the institutionalization of its knowledge production in the university—*outside of the abuse, shame, humiliation, and indignity—in short, the sheer pain—black women are made to endure.*

Herein, you will read authors who insist that Afro-pessimism is a more elaborate, sophisticated, and comprehensive iteration of black feminism and black reproductivity, and others who insist that Afro-pessimism is little more than a thirsty scheme to steal black feminist energy to give provenance to a “death dealing”⁷² taxonomy of claims, making Afro-pessimism perhaps the height of intramural violence. Williams writes of intramural violence as

a painful debate...that reveals much about the desire to live and belong, and the degree to which that desire can bring about misrecognitions of Afro-pessimism’s critique. It is not a critique of black achievement and striving; rather, it is an indictment of all that circumscribes, elides and obliterates those who enact or strive to enact them.⁷³

Black feminist research and its creative lives are the building blocks of both the world that must be undone and of Afro-pessimism—yet

another wor(l)d that must be undone. Afro-pessimism's relationship to black feminism accordingly operates like the ongoing power relations described by Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke in their exposé on the Bronx Slave Market,⁷⁴ a day labor site in New York City that marked several powerful transitions in national and global economies and in the roles which Black women workers would play in them. The most important of these powerful transitions would be the new meanings attached to an enduring fact—that everyone has and will continue to traffic in the social identities and personae that they make for themselves by exploiting black women's labor as distinctively productive and reproductive. By 1935, when Baker and Cooke wrote—during the Great Depression—black women workers could be found on street corners waiting to be taken in to perform day labor and to exist in the economy primarily as living accoutrements for lower-middle class white women and their male relatives. Baker and Cooke write,

Symbolic of the more humane slave block is the Jerome avenue "market." There, on benches surrounding a green square, the victims wait, grateful, at least, for some place to sit. In direct contrast is the Simpson avenue "mart," where they pose wearily against buildings and lampposts, or scuttle about in an attempt to retrieve discarded boxes upon which to rest.

Again, the Simpson avenue block exudes the stench of the slave market at its worst. Not only is human labor bartered and sold for slave wage, but human love also is a marketable commodity. But whether it is labor, or love that is sold, economic necessity compels the sale. As early as 8 a.m. they come; as late as 1 p.m. they remain.

Rain or shine, cold or hot, you will find them there—Negro women, old and young—sometimes bedraggled, sometimes neatly dressed—but with the invariable paper bundle, waiting expectantly for Bronx housewives to buy their strength and energy for an hour, two hours, or even for a day at the munificent rate of fifteen, twenty, twenty-five, or, if luck be with them, thirty cents an hour. If not the wives themselves, maybe their husbands, their sons, or their brothers, under the subterfuge of work, offer worldly-wise girls higher bids for their time.

Who are these women? What brings them here? Why do they stay? ...They come...not because of what it promises, but largely in desperation.

...Negro women pressed to the wall by poverty, starvation and discrimination.

...Where once color was the “gilt edged” security for obtaining domestic and personal service jobs, here, even, Negro women found themselves being displaced by whites.⁷⁵

While black feminism, defined as the organized rebellion against the institutionalized and systematic particular vulnerabilities that black women and the black feminine endure, is marshaled to birth Afro-pessimism in the analogy to *partus sequitur ventrum*, other structural transitions also mark the making of Afro-pessimism in the analogy to the Bronx Slave Market. Transitional considerations include privatization; the generalized carcerality and militarization of the society; the gendering of a feminized care industry that employs racialized migrants from former colonies and present territories; the intensification of corporate control of electoral politics and of education; the approaches to advocating for access to education, employment benefits, health care, rights to the city, and access to credit that blur the line between conceding to neoliberalism and fighting against it; the non-enforcement of sexual harassment policies throughout society; and experiences of yet again (always, already) realizing that the larger society advances the hopes, dreams, and aspirations of every social group through making-an-object-lesson of blackness and through justifying deadly antiblack discursive, libidinal, and material relations—for example, the increasing numbers of black people who enter into higher education institutions only to realize that their presence there primarily creates cosmopolitan experiences for the majority (i.e., non-black) population. Other transitions include the intensification of marking blackness as a non-political entity, marking blackness as lacking specific coordinates of space and time but being everywhere a sign of shame and of failure, marking blackness as the antithesis of making, being, and knowing—anything. Black women’s positions, to reiterate, inaugurate new fields, extend terrains of possibility, and usher these same bodies into enduring harm through what contributor Jeremy DeCristo describes in his essay as “symbolically similar yet materially worse labor conditions as whites”—and through (also in DeCristo’s words) entrenching “blackness as a commodity.”

This collection begins with Tiffany Lethabo King’s “Black ‘Feminisms’ and Pessimism: Abolishing Moynihan’s Negro Family,” which interrogates Daniel Patrick Moynihan’s caricatures of black motherhood and historicizes the trope of “the family” as inherently humanist and essentially antiblack. King asks: “What happens to Black life when categories like the family are imposed upon it? What happens to the lives of poor Black women in particular?”

King's black feminist abolitionism recounts the "anti-genealogical descriptions of fugitive communities" and "motherless and stateless tribes" invoked by Saidiya Hartman in *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997) to re-read Kay Lindsey's essay "The Black Woman as Woman" (1970), Hortense Spillers' essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" (1987), and Sapphire's novel *Push* (1996). King's re-readings conceive of a full-stop rejection of the family, including the "slave family" and its "attachments to the liberal humanistic concept of the filial as the organizing frame for black collective life." In King's reading of Lindsey, the family represents an accumulation of property through slaves, children, wives, land, and expansionist ideologies about how to acquire and accumulate more of the same.⁷⁶ King renders Spillers a "proto-Afro-pessimist" because: "If black captive communities could not constitute a family, they did and can constitute something else. For instance, black female flesh in the form of the black matriarch disfigures the institution of the family and renders it a site of rebellion where the orders of property and space implode." For Sapphire, the paradox whereby "a stranger [meets her] and [loves her]" but her own biological kin knows Precious only as the wound of their and her injuries, is an explosive and unhinging reality that returns us to the abolitionist practice of slaves. In this abolitionism, I may not be your mother/I may not be your child, but together we will be on the move, on a move; together, for a moment, our fates will be linked and we will undo the propriety that calls for silence about what is happening to each of us so that those who violate us can accumulate more property, can make more citizens, can sanitize those free people away from us slaves. King explains, "Precious as a literary figure represents the lives and experiences of a number of black girls for whom the promise of safety within the confines of a respectable and heteronormative family has failed to materialize. The courage to create something new through unnamingsomething" — the family — "as true and universal in order to realize another mode of living and thriving is the story that Precious and other survivors embody." King's wholesale rejection of the concept of family serves to amplify "alternative modes of naming the self in relation to others outside of the Western humanist tradition" and to encourage more experimental, inventive, and dynamic practices of black sociality under threat. Such socialities are not concerned with accumulation or building rank and status; the member of these alternative socialities are interested in persisting and enduring for the period in which they do as chance witnesses to each other's desires and states of existence. Citing Hartman's *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007), King envisions a property-destroying anti-familial coming-together of "fugitives and the refugees and multitudes in flight" who, "knowing

that [they can't] ever regain what [they've] lost...[embrace] something other than who they [have] been and [name] themselves again" – for, as Hartman explains, "It [does] not matter that they [are not] kin or that they [speak] a different language, because genealogy [does] not matter" and because "'we' [is] the collectivity [we build] from the ground up."⁷⁷

King's essay thus draws on these works – and Frank B. Wilderson III's, too – to locate in their "black feminist and queer modes of critique" the call for "a distinctly abolitionist critique of the family."⁷⁸ She suggests that black invocations of the family enact a kind of "borrowed institutionality"⁷⁹ and are dangerous because "the family functions as a site of violence and dehumanization that threatens to engulf black sociality" and to bind the black matriarch "to failure [...] beyond redemption." We might, following King's exhortation, seek out "modes of black social life [...] akin to the ways that the motherless slave" as a "[fugitive] without genealogy" enacts black sociality – as the promiscuity induced by "other-Mothering" and "play cousin" relations, or in Alexis Pauline Gumbs' formulation, as "m/other" relations.

King defines the archetypal black matriarch in two ways: first, as a figure that "forecloses upon the possibility of imagining non-nuclear family formations as viable [options for Black sociality]" and which "vilifies Black single female sexual autonomy, [reinforcing] an ethos of personal responsibility, [disavowing] structural inequality, and [making] it almost impossible to imagine a politics of redistribution." Secondly, King interrogates the black matriarch archetype Moynihan elaborates for the ways in which his caricature props up alternative modes of the black family that actually fail to undo the concept and its "normative" and "humanizing" project. Black matriarchy and the black family are, as King explicates them, fighting words – a "tangle of pathology" in which the critique of blackness is the critique of matriarchy.

Such concepts as family and matriarchy have powerful and important meanings especially in the hands of those who wish to govern and authorize their own power. King's intellectual history is an important one for recovering how sociology, history, and other social sciences have consistently produced "knowledge" and "expertise" about black people in ways that shore up the policies that have conflated blackness and black people with the enduring status of the slave. But these were not just any slaves; as contributor Patrice D. Douglass explains in her included essay, they were sexualized slaves, made perverse through Hellenomania's imperial claims on knowledge. Greg Thomas details this Hellenomania in his body of work⁸⁰ and further elaborates its effects in his contribution to this volume.

La Shonda Carter and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard in "What kind of mother is she? From Margaret Garner to Rosa Lee Ingram to Mamie

Till to the Murder of Korryn Gaines” examine the life and death of Korryn Gaines as a contemporary example of the Moynihan caricature. They especially interrogate Gaines’ representation in “the masculinist social media” that “vilified [her] status as a mother and as a woman” and in which “[her] sound judgments were critiqued through stories that implied or overtly stated that she had cognitive ‘deficits’” to ask how these representations “author(iz)ed her murder.” More specifically, they recount “this particular type of social media dragging” to ask how and why it is “that in 2016, an armed Korryn Gaines faced summary execution by the state when her political foremothers...met [their] attackers with force, *and yet survived.*” Carter and Willoughby-Herard contextualize Gaines in the tradition of Margaret Garner, Rosa Lee Ingram, and Mamie Till—a “trans-historical community of militant Black mothers” who are “linked through a shared commitment to their own autonomy and to self-made definitions of defending their kin and children”—to consider how Gaines “intimately involved [her son] in her acts of self-defense,” specifically, the instruction whereby she prompts him to “speak to the live video feed that the police are ‘trying to kill us’”. Rather than dance with death to (further) expose him to the “quotidian violence” of state terror—a violence in which black mothers are scapegoated and in which “Black children’s lives [are] available to be taken at any time”—Gaines’ violence interrupts her son’s gratuitous availability for capture and premature death. Carter and Willoughby-Herard thus “challenge violent behaviors, social practices, and norms that are not generally viewed as violent because they are targeting Black female gendered persons” so that we might come to think about violence against black women as an ungendering violence that effects not just black women but black communities as a whole. They interrogate the cultural myths that “pathologize Black mothers’ political action” to clarify that black vulnerability to state violence is unmoored by “the social categories that are used to make sense of [non-black] lives,” like “motherhood, childhood, [and] womanhood.” This latter claim that social categories “remain not only just beyond [black women’s] grasp, but [that] when [they] are connected to them...make [black women] even more vulnerable and more profoundly condemned” anticipates Patrice D. Douglass’s argument in “Black Feminist Theory for the Dead and The Dying” that social categories like gender invoke “[grammars] of suffering...[and lend] discursive capacity” to “crowd out that which cannot be said about the extent of antiblackness.”

Patrice Douglass explains that Gaines’ life and death, including the afterlife of her capture in media representations and public discourse—what Carter and Willoughby-Herard describe as “the journalistic story of her life,” which “[collapses Gaines] into a neat caricature”: “young, unmarried, black mother of two children fathered by different

men, and [outwardly defiant] of state authority” —evinces an “(un)gendering violence”. Black feminism and Afro-pessimism reverberate to reinforce each other in Douglass’ account. If we “[think] gender within the cognitive disruption that is Blackness,” as Douglass does, then “black death animates the discourse of gender violence while rendering the relationship between gender and antiblackness void through its assumptive underpinnings.” The “black female gender” Douglass invokes is a figure that “is always undone, unrealized, and violated,” and precisely because she is undone, is “central to slavery and its afterlife” — in other words, to the black social death that is Afro-pessimism’s wheelhouse. Douglass takes particular issue with the January 22, 2017 Women’s March on Washington, D.C., where “blackness was a haunting in waiting” as “a critical engagement with the state of black lives was violently supplanted with a perceived susceptibility to gratuitous death for those not figured by blackness.” “Little space [was] provided [at the march],” Douglass explains, “outside of the use of the phrasing ‘communities of color’” and invocations of bell hooks’ name, and Marsha P. Johnson’s name, and Audre Lorde’s name, and Barbara Smith’s name, and Harriet Tubman’s name — “to formulation a narrative to account for gender violence that totalizes blackness across gender.” (Of course, as we know, Angela Davis, who was in attendance, would have read the invocation of these names quite differently.) For Douglass, the Women’s March could not “through theory or performance [...] grapple with...the specificities of black gender.” Douglass’ analysis of the “sexualization of black gender” as one that “binds a suffering *community*” clarifies Afro-pessimism’s critique for thinking black gendered experiences at the same time as it traces a black feminist genealogy that exceeds Afro-pessimism’s and specifically Wilderson’s invocation of black thingification in the ship’s hold.⁸¹ Douglass argues that black women like Gaines “[carry] the *antecedents* of an arrangement where human cargo is held captive on ships and logged without gender.” The ungendering violence that they endure, Douglass suggests, precedes the hold of the slave ship, as even “before the hold, the visibility of *her* body served as justification for capture.” For Douglass, “the slave trade catapulted” not from the theft whereby, as Wilderson writes, “Africans went into the hold of ships as bodies and emerged from the holds of those ships as ‘flesh,’”⁸² but “from the bareness of her bosom” and “the robustness of her posterior flesh” — the image of the black woman in the bush, which contributor M. Shadee Malaklou describes as a space-time outside of History, ossified in our collective imagination as a time before time.

Selamawit D. Terrefe’s “Speaking the Hieroglyph” considers how a psychoanalysis of racial blackness that privileges the absented imago of the black feminine “[articulates] not only the machinations of the black psyche, but also black intramural relations” and the phobo-

genic dis/association of the unconscious with the hated “black part” of the (non-)self. Stated another way, to explore the psychic dimensions of blackness one must take a tip from Freud – with a departure. If Freud instructs us to excavate the unconscious by studying dreams, then Terrefe instructs us to excavate the black unconscious by studying the black female/feminine. Such a posture suggests that the black female/feminine is not just the harbinger of freedom dreams that are yet to come, but may signify or contain the freedom dreams themselves. Terrefe opens the essay with a question from Sharpe’s ground-breaking treatise *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016), wherein she asks, “What must we know in order to move through these environments in which the push is always toward Black death?”⁸³ This question points to the certainty whereby black bodies move through hostile spaces. Terrefe reminds us that we will have to move, that we will be on a move, that our moving was ordained before our arrival, and that our being without homes constitutes cozy pleasures for others. Terrefe asserts that black people enter the world biologically and symbolically faced with a terrible fact: that “the material and psychic violence attendant to the construction of racial blackness...precedes one’s subjective experience and phenomenology of it.” The black woman Terrefe takes up as the site of theft—a theft of the black body (i.e., of language and the possibility of expressiveness that produces the body’s meaning as a “territory of cultural and political maneuver”) and of black interiority—shores up her argument that “blackness is a void unto a black (non-)self.” Terrefe invokes Spillers’ distinction of the black female captive as the paradigmatic site of un-signified/unsigned flesh, specifically, Spillers’ claim that black women are the “principal point of passage between the human and the non-human world”⁸⁴ to consider the role of the “black woman as the arbiter of blackness itself.” As “an object void of jouissance,” the black woman in Terrefe’s essay “[serves] as a conduit for the jouissance of white, or non-black, people whose subjectivity, or status as human, hinges upon the construction of slaves, or the black, as antihuman.” Terrefe’s attention to the black woman as a master-signifier reveals racial blackness as a psychic rupture. Her analysis disabuses readers of Kristeva’s notion of the abject and supplements David Marriott’s Fanonian reading of the fractured black psyche with the prismatic argument that—inssofar as black women signify racial blackness and racial blackness signifies void—the black female experience of racial blackness “undergirds and drives the language and discourse of not only psychoanalysis but the unconscious itself.” Terrefe’s argument, which elaborates the psychic life of a political ontology whereby racial blackness is characterized—totalized—by what Jared Sexton describes as “a perpetual and involuntary *openness*,”⁸⁵ thus intervenes in not just the study of black abjection but in the protocols of psychoanalysis.

The black woman in Terrefe's analysis is a "key site" for the making of racial blackness as an "ontological dead space that is indicative of rupture," typified by "a psyche split from a non-self, inaugurated and governed by absence and loss," at the same time as "the black female imago operates as a mythic site in the unconscious." Terrefe implies that while Marriott and Spillers both wrestle with the "promise of black life and...the psychic purchase of black absence and loss," in other words, while their writings exist in a kind of enduring conversation of intramural entanglement, Marriott explores the "nothingness of being" by embracing absence and loss, and Spillers prescribes a disciplined practice of self-inquiry, acknowledging the "'monstrosity of (a female with the capacity to 'name')'" as the ultimate "interior intersubjectivity." Terrefe excels when discussing the mutual constitution of ungendered black (non-)ontology, writing that "a rivalry against the black woman...masks the relationship of aggressivity towards blackness writ large, towards all black 'flesh' 'ungendered.'" This clarity cautions that the dreamworld, misread as a largely visual arena, must instead be interpreted as a world of word puzzles and cipher-work—not stereoscope or kinoscope but a confluence of the wor(l)ds used by black women to name how "black suffering...affects the deepest levels of the psyche." While Douglass' essay elaborates the political ontology that makes black women the arbiters of black (social) death, Terrefe's essay elaborates the metaphysical bind whereby black women are positioned as the anchors or custodians of black (social) death at the same time as they are positioned as the only tether black (social) life has ever known and will ever know. Terrefe further proceeds with a discussion of the particular and foundational ruptures of black (not *mothering* but) motherhood as a construct "sutured to a history of *property* relations, rather than [to] kinship ties" and framed through an ontological world made possible through the antiblackness of slavery and racial capitalism. Terrefe claims that these relations, which return us to Moynihan's caricature, are "illuminated by the state's and civil society's reach, which extends from and beyond the ship's hole," insofar as "the severing of kinship ties of ascent and the erasure of maternal claims to descendants" bond black relationality, "whether on the plantation or via the foster 'care' and carceral systems"—all of which are systems of detention, custody, theft of the body, and the creation of property.

In "Black Ethnography, Black(Female)Aesthetics: Thinking/Writing/Saying/Sounding Black Political Life," Zenzele Isoke speaks (writes) from the site of what in Terrefe's summation is "ontological dead space" to describe black ethnographic storytelling as a black *mothering*, specifically, as "the Blackest mother"—a m/other who makes home for us in the fugitivity of her homelessness and "that sweet smell of musk floating from between [her] thighs." Like sev-

eral other contributions to this volume, Isoke's essay explores theories about how sound mediates black improvisation without reducing the blossoming and unpredictable nature of liberation into a linear pre-scripted project achieved by Eurocentric humanist aesthetics. Isoke names herself as a *pretunureblackfemalephd* and *blackfemalephd* to underscore how black women pay for the white social life of the university with their creative lives. She asks, aloud, so that her *pretunureblackfemalephd* and *blackfemalephd* sisters can hear her, "Why be a slave to discipline when I only [have] one life?" In this lyrical, experimental essay, Isoke theorizes the black ethnographer as "speaking flesh" and abandons "the modernist strictures of the formal essay" to insist that a "counterstructural aesthetic rooted in black musicality and orality have typically not found their way into the poetics used by those who write black social life in the social sciences." Not only this, but the many black radical scholarly works that launched our contemporary humanistic and philosophical approaches to critical social science have been largely suppressed, erased, and minimized. This results in a different type of writing which literally and figuratively—as content and form—foregrounds the black feminine unconscious, reaching out from the across the sacred if "ontologically dead" spaces of black feminine interiority to "[reject] the historical prohibition of speaking blackness through the everyday of our brokenness." Isoke brilliantly coils "the past, present and future...around each other like that tiny black curl at the nape of your neck your grandmama used to call a 'kitchen'" to elaborate black feminist scholarship as "a full-throated laugh in the most miserable of circumstances," indeed, as the "fearless embrace of that which is nameless, formless, unseen yet present nonetheless." The black feminist scholar Isoke writes about, as, and through moves us "into the ecstasy of alterity" by appealing not to "a singular self, a historical self, or [even] a transcendent self, but rather...[to] an imaginative life-world that we have shut ourselves off to." In Isoke's hands, this imaginative life-world theorizes with Spillers' "interior intersubjectivity"—a self-disciplined self-interrogation that commences without knowledge of its outcome—to produce the new concept "phonoethnography." Phonoethnography attends to: 1) the "symbolic economies of blackness rooted in alternative cosmological paradigms and lifeworlds in postslavery contemporary life;" and 2) "[loops] time, s/place, and experience backward and forward at the same time, [to create an] alternative theory and aesthetics of decolonial writing...that honors black cultural resonances" and "abandon heteromasculinist linguistic and psychic regimes of whiteness that often discipline people of color academics." Isoke locates this elsewhere and elsewhen in multiple sites—"the incarcerated child, the decrepit body, the lonely crone, the nappy headed boy in the back of the class called by somebody else's name" and even the black womb. Her invocation of the

black womb as one such site—as “a black, unseen place that generously offers itself up to...unborn ghosts” and “symbolic economies of blackness rooted in alternative cosmological paradigms”—anticipates Malaklou’s description of the black womb as a gestational ground-zero for promises of freedom that are yet to come but are cooking nonetheless.

Jeremy DeCristo’s “Music Against the Subject” reads Toni Morrison’s *Jazz* and James Van Der Zee’s *Harlem Book of the Dead* to “jazz” the: 1) “unwieldy sonic dimensions of black music as black life that evades symbolic containment and capture as the subject,” and 2) “imaginary of black sounding and living that is so often silenced by the subject,” whether that subject is the legal world that must be undone or the historical recovery projects of narration of true events “that strain against being given a hearing.” Morrison’s and Van Der Zee’s stagings of death do not plead for the law or for Atticus Finch to swoop in and save; instead, they are marked by an intentionally-scripted and -crafted “impersonal intimacy.” As Carter’s and Willoughby-Herard’s co-authored essay demonstrates, the scandal of Dorcas’s death—Dorcas is the young female character of Morrison’s *Jazz*—like the scandal of the dragging of young activist Korryn Gaines (and Claudette Colvin before her), and like the scandal of sanitizing Rosa Parks’ political history⁸⁶ to make her available as a hollow symbol for the racially liberal account of one of the most violent and protracted interruptions of American apartheid—the civil rights movement—exemplifies the ways in which blackness if listened to carefully constantly exceeds recording. Meant to be erased, meant to be caricatured as willing co-conspirators in antiblack violence, racial blackness as it is elaborated in De Cristo’s account of jazz breaks through. Which is to say, sometimes ongoing gendered black activism and pressure effectively forces the state and civil society to reckon with whatever happened to such hyper-marginal black figures—the “missing” black women and girls—whether they were trafficked by police pimps, forced to have sex with police officers and/or employers and then arrested, thieved by transnational militants to raise an army from their wombs, or simply lionized into recoverable white feminine gendered norms of public sympathy, intramurally and by the world.⁸⁷ But even then, black peoples’ stories as they are captured and coerced into the custody of historians, legislators, photographers, creative writers, musicians, and journalists—and even when those custodians assert that such forms of murderous treatment are the direct legacy of the death-dealing and white life-creating nature of slavery—still exceed the terrain of being feared yet suprahuman prey. DeCristo captures the irony, labor, and social imaginaries that must come together so that Dorcas’s coerced story is not discarded as her corpse was—in spite of the whispering contempt of people who should have seen Dorcas’s vulnerability as a reflection

of their own, as Willoughby-Herard reminds us in her single-authored essay and through her tarrying with the Combahee River Collective's words: "The only people who care enough about us to work consistently for our liberation are us. Our politics evolve from a healthy love for ourselves, our sisters and our community which allows us to continue our struggle and work."⁸⁸ While that "we" is always provisional, contingent, and liminal, and while sometimes that "work" is a remembered but suppressed moan, and though those aspiring to capture the power of the social would have us believe otherwise, we are not only (photographed) prey. Or perhaps, if we are prey, indeed, if we are non-ontological and monstrous – the epitome of the haunting non-being – then such locations are more than enough to remind us, as Isoke does, of "where we are and how we struggle." Let us fight more ferociously to reside in what Isoke dubs as the "kitchen," where, "cosmic imaginings of black life catapult...[us] into a new consciousness as [we become] the impossible – speaking flesh," a living dead suspended in #blackgirlmagic.

Jaye Austin Williams in "Radical Black Drama-as-Theory: The Black Feminist Dramatic on the Protracted Event-Horizon" introduces a drama theory that conjoins black feminism and Afro-pessimism, challenging some of the latter's more common misconceptions – for example, that Afro-pessimism is "a critique of black achievement and striving." Williams explains that Afro-pessimism does not proscribe black excellence, creativity, and cultural production but is in fact "an indictment of all that circumscribes, elides, and obliterates those who enact or strive to enact" black sociality. Of the many things that are generative in Williams' essay and her burgeoning body of writing more generally – Williams' approach is to "apply a structural and political analysis to blackness [and to black cultural production] as the site against, upon, and through which the world derives its bearing and coheres its soci(et)al apparatuses, pleasures, and relations" – the most important for our purposes is an insistence on and capacity for sitting inside a conflictual intramural conversation. Williams poignantly asks of the actors in this intramural debate, "What are we fighting so hard for? And even more urgently, why are we fighting *each other* so hard?" In her contribution to this volume, which excerpts her larger book project, Williams mines the plays of drama heavyweights Suzi-Lori Parks, Lynn Nottage, and Kia Corthron that "signify dramatically on the black being's attempts to enter the 'incomplete project of freedom'." She scours their plays and especially Parks' *The America Play* and *Topdog/Underdog* for the "'subterranean' – or, supernumerary – longitude of 'living'" they (super)enumerate as "the pith of black intramural theoretical debate."

Taken together, Isoke's, DeCristo's, and Williams' essays imagine a performative space for black social relations that activates what

Williams describes as a “riffing” between the discursive tensions of Afro-pessimism and black feminism. Which is to say, their essays evoke an/Other sensorium to perceive and feel black sociality. Isoke elaborates in the experiential form of her essay what exceeds capacity in words, and DeCristo *listens* for black sociality at those sites in which the ocular field cannot but reproduce a humanist gaze that itemizes and objectifies the being of the black, reducing her being to bits and pieces of discarded and hieroglyphicized “flesh” —raw material for our humanist world-making. DeCristo reminds us that “we can and often are moving and dancing outside the bounds of the liberal subject’s circle of recognition,” and helps us to begin to develop a praxis whereby we listen for black (social) life at literary and photographic — ocular — sites saturated with images of black death. Williams, too, rejects the trap of the humanist gaze and humanist world-making; for her part, she does so through a method that “does not expose the psychological underpinnings of [dramatic] writers and their characters... [but] labors to expose the vast dimensions at and through which the world metabolizes the black into an object vulnerable to an overdetermined violent affect against which that being’s own affects (acts, gestures, and will/intent) are powerless.” Individually, each in its own way, and together, in sequence, the interventions evinced in Isoke’s, DeCristo’s, and Williams’ essays hail Jared Sexton’s call, which is the character Topsy’s refrain in George C. Wolfe’s 1986 play *The Colored Museum*, to “dance to ‘the music of the madness’” that is black social death—to live in the only space that has ever been available to (not African-ness but) racial blackness: the space of an “unending, uninterrupted captivity,” because it is there, in that madness, that one might locate a black self, and black freedom. As Topsy exclaims, “THERE’S MADNESS IN ME AND THAT MADNESS SETS ME FREE.”⁸⁹

M. Shadee Malaklou’s “‘Dilemmas’ of Coalition and the Chronopolitics of Man: Towards an Insurgent Black Feminine Otherwise” concerns itself with how and why the suffering of non-black peoples of color has come to matter now, in the era of Trump and globally. Calling Trump as American as apple pie, Malaklou demonstrates the ways in which American liberalism (and liberalism more generally) is not as capacious as it claims to be and is inclusive only to the extent that it is a white nationalism. For Malaklou, nonblack peoples of color play a critical and necessary role in shoring up the claim that this modern world *can even make room for the likes of them*, provided, of course, that their citizenship follows a very strict national and international narrative —bursting with loyalty and praise for the white nationalism that they enter into two centuries late(r), as members of “child races” or, as Wilderson describes them, “junior partners.” Malaklou argues that nonblack peoples of color can only be redeemed by the white nationalism that they pander to if and when they stand in

for and play the part of a recoverable blackness; in other words, if and when they profess to having been rejuvenated and saved from blackness as a pre-human antiquity, remade from its always already late claim to civilization's spoils. Following Saidiya Hartman's discussion in *Scenes of Subjection* of how and why emancipated blacks were barred from the discourse and protection of rights, and Frantz Fanon's discussion of the totalizing cultural logic of "honorary whiteness," Malaklou reminds us that

nonblack suffering in Trump's America is [...] exceptional only if we ignore the ontologically primary *structural* position of anti/blackness; that is to say, if we sanitize and rehabilitate the promise of liberal America by closing our eyes to the uninterrupted suffering that black persons who are ineligible for rights endure. We who feel ourselves defenseless in the twilight of America's becoming—nonblack minorities—might pause to consider how in the narration of our suffering we refuse to recognize and thus obscure the privilege whereby our suffering is periodized, documented, tracked, and ultimately, mourned. We might further pause to consider how in these narrations we refuse to recognize that the contingent suffering of our nonblack persons is made entirely possible, not least of all in a US context, by the unending and senseless suffering of the black as a *subject-that-is-not-one*.

Whether pursued or simply granted, this status of honorary whiteness or "borrowed institutionality" is discredited as a sympathetic and/or deserving moral defense by how "shamelessly absent we who are not fungible" — Malaklou writes to other nonblack peoples of color — "have been from organized efforts to disrupt the gross violation of black flesh that is carried out in our names." Thus, Malaklou warns that protests against the Border Wall and the Muslim Ban and even concerns about the Syrian refugee crisis create a temporary (i.e., time-bound, or news cycle-length) attention to and platform for the nonblack peoples of color effected by those policies at the same time as they entrench antiblack humanism or "humanism as a race/ism," since the human "can only ever know himself as what he is not: a black African." Malaklou argues that nonblack peoples of color who protest xenophobia in Trump's America do not recognize that their relationship to American (as in, white modern) progress narratives is episodic and laden with appeals to become legible as human, which means to become legible as not-black/not-the black feminine/not-the black queer. For Malaklou, the protestors make a non-sympathetic appeal to be protected from the proverbial lash and the murderous subjection that constitutes black non-being. In a bid to avoid the pathology and pain of humanism's race/ism, which is to say, in a bid to circumvent and transcend their own racializations, nonblack peoples of color reproduce deadly anti-

black discursive and material relations. They are complicit in not just the practice of racial slavery, which survives today in their communities—Malaklou reminds us that “African migrants from Senegal, The Gambia, and the Sub-Sahara” are, in the light of our present day, being “kidnapped [in Libya] on their way to Europe (Libya is a major exit point for boat travel to Europe) and sold in public squares to Arab locals”—but also in the silence/silencing surrounding the auctioning of black bodies. By Malaklou’s calculation, the same news-cycle that belabors nonblack suffering cannot hear (*pace* DeCristo) stories about Libya’s auction block because nonblack lamentations drown them out. Malaklou turns towards such grimy, entangled moments that shuttle us between black and nonblack sites of suffering to note the callous willingness in Southwest Asian and North Africa countries and their diasporic communities in the Americas to become human at the literal cost of African and African-descended peoples’ lives. Such moments are evidence enough of whose flesh will be bought and traded for our freedom dreams.

Malaklou concludes that it is better to leave freedom dreams cooking in the space-time of the black womb—an “insurgent Black feminine Otherwise” where they can remain unbought and unbossed—than to ask the black m/other to birth them. Such a birthing would reduce the m/other (i.e., black mothering) to mother (i.e., black motherhood), doing away with our freedom dreams altogether. Seeking after “the subterranean possibility of an/Other, non-human becoming that might take its cue from the black maternal as a site of social life-in-death—more to the point, as the site of life-in-stasis and non-movement, outside of humanist constructions of time, or...its chronopolitical order of Man,” Malaklou offers an anti-historical/un-historical account of relationality that does not rely on disavowing the positionality of the black feminine who constitutes what Spillers describes as the “zero degree of social conceptualization.”⁹⁰ Malaklou like Terreffe hence thinks about the psychic or libidinal and (as) material economy whereby racial blackness signifies a hyper-penetrable hole, or as Terreffe describes it, void. Malaklou’s turn towards temporality and the ways in which space-time structures the pursuit of the human (championed by those chanting in hopes of producing an “all lives matter” future) points to how significations in the law that have yielded “white by law” decisions and “great moments in the Civil Rights Movement” punctuate attempts to erase or minimize black feminine political action in the face of a continued “default on the promissory note of justice,” as Dr. King put it in his August 28, 1963 “I Have a Dream” speech at the March for Jobs and Freedom. Black people wrestle with being property, not kin; that is to say, they wrestle with being the inheritance of those designated as kin.⁹¹ But if this is the paradigmatic structure of the world’s making, then certainly we must agree that everyone

else—nonblack peoples of color who disavow their racializations, First Nations peoples who think sovereignty collectively, and black and nonblack refugees who are migrants and displaced persons—must also wrestle with the non-being of the black and the murderous treatment of black persons that makes this world (that must be undone). All dissembling appeals to embodying proper models of rainbow citizenship aside, if we believe (as Afro-pessimism encourages us to) that antiblackness and non-being are world-structuring realities, then we must also believe that those peoples who are racialized through space and time and through antiblackness and proximity to blackness are also black—politically, socially, and historically, if not ontologically. 2Pac’s “Me Against the World” said it better: “Maybe he’ll listen in his casket. ...More bodies being buried, I’m losing my homies in a hurry. They’re relocatin’ to the cemetery. ...The question is, will I live? ...Unless we’re shootin’ no one notices the youth.” *Listening from the casket*, to invoke DeCristo’s exhortation, is the literal requirement for being and non-being in a world made by antiblackness. And while people in different social, legal, temporal, and spatial categories are positioned in disparate but mutually constituted ways in relationship to this casket, if we believe (as DeCristo does) that listening from the casket is possible, then we have much more theoretical work to do yet. Malaklou’s essay begins this work, imploring us to think about not the “altruistic” but the “self-interested” labors of what nonblack people are doing by attending/not attending our funeral(s), hanging/not hanging our portrait(s), sending/not sending flowers, and jumping/not jumping headlong into the grave after us.

Tiffany Willoughby-Herard’s “(Political) Anesthesia or (Political) Memory: The Combahee River Collective and the Death of Black Women in Custody” brings concerns for the black female body in pain and biomedical racialization to bear on practices of breeding and the control of black women’s reproductive labors. Arguing that these practices of surveillance and monitoring function less as practices of accountancy and more as practices that entrench typical ways of response to dead and injured black women’s bodies, Willoughby-Herard links the medical plantation to the contemporary deaths of black women. She urges us to “sharpen [our] oyster knives,” as Zora Neale Hurston admonished, to “polish our [hoes],” as Austin Clarke fictionalized, and to be the only witnesses who can be relied on to testify against the myth that “we feel no pain,” as so powerfully dramatized by Petra Kuppens, Anita Gonzalez, Carrie Sandahl, Tiye Giraud, and Aimee Meredith Cox. Reflecting on Spillers’ careful description of the black female body on the plantation as the basis of society in the Americas—this is “not the representational regime of a body typified by cohesion,” as Malaklou puts it in her contribution to the volume—Willoughby-Herard turns to the lack of cohesion typified by black feminine flesh

ungendered to explore the murders of black women in custody by thinking with the lessons of the Combahee River Collective's response to a Boston serial killer in their pamphlets, *Six Black Women Why Did They Die?* and *Eleven Black Women: Why Did They Die?* (1979). Staging a deliberately unwieldy genealogy beyond the writings of Spillers and Hartman, on the one hand, and of Sexton and Wilderson, on the other hand, Willoughby-Herard draws primarily from the theories of power, the theories of violence, and the theories of the state offered by the Combahee River Collective in these two political philosophical tracts to trace the afterlife of the medical plantation. By Willoughby-Herard's calculation, the deaths of black women in custody help the state—a slave polity—cohere and know itself as a project of governance-making. Willoughby-Herard's claim is anchored by Combahee's call that we are not (just) prey—though we are so truly often treated as such. Combahee's response to the murder of black women in Boston give us the tools and the training to occupy the preserves of the undead. In Willoughby-Herard's own words, Combahee provides us with "a centuries-long toolkit of organized collective action and militant response by black women in the Americas to fight against enduring violence."

Secondarily, Willoughby-Herard analyzes *The Anarcha Project* (2008/9) and *The Polished Hoe* (2003) as "examples of the conditions that animated the Combahee River Collective's attention to state, vigilante, and interpersonal violence against Black women," and as a way to describe the ideology and violence of the medical plantation and "of scientifically applied and routinized sexualized violence" more generally. Her argument that "the science of gynecology was born in the monitoring and control over the wombs of enslaved African women" suggests that black women's bodies, specifically, their wombs are dangerous sites when made into instruments for the plantation state. Even/especially as the black womb engenders and is the harbinger of promises of rebellion, which is how Isoke and Malaklou describe it, the black womb also (primarily) functions as what Sharpe describes as a "domestic middle passage,"⁹² insofar as it makes black women vulnerable to the reproductive labor of chattel slavery and its afterlife. Willoughby-Herard thus holds the "both/and" of black (social) death and black (social) life in the same frame, to think about the inception of black (social) life as the tomb of black (social) death. Her brave insights remind us of a difficult truth—that the antiblackness that makes the world (that must be undone) is indistinguishable from the promises of black rebellion (that will undo the world) insofar as both demand from black women their "pound of flesh."⁹³ From Willoughby-Herard, we learn that Western Jim Crow pro-segregation medicine invented and learned the technologies it uses to "extend life" for the "ontologically/civically/socially alive"—for white and white-passing peoples, including the allegedly nonblack peoples Malaklou takes up—through

the “bloodletting” of black women. The medical plantation clarifies the biopolitical order of our world-making as a necropolitical order in which “[the] technologies that advance the quality of (white) life [...] must be understood as benefits for those who are legible as socially and juridically alive while those same new technologies require the sacrifice of always already expendable black bodies.” Willoughby-Herard thus recounts the history of the medical plantation as “the place where medicine and law collide and where slave (ontologically/civically/socially dead) and free (ontologically/civically/socially alive) are born,” so that we can “[reckon] with [the] slave status and freedom marching through black women’s wombs and the social lives that their wombs represent.”

Greg Thomas’s “Afro-Blue Notes: The Death of Afro-pessimism (2.0)?” raises difficult questions about our reading habits, about basic literacy in black radical and revolutionary thought, and about what criteria ought to be brought to bear for considering what counts as black radical and revolutionary thought if what we are doing is to be connected to the “historic Black Studies Movement,” which includes the study of how African thinkers like Cheikh Anta Diop make black demands for revolution outside of the container of social death that is Afro-pessimism’s truth claim. Thomas leaves us with questions like: *Who are we reading and why are we reading them? Do we wish to read anyone else? What would that mean for our thinking if we were to read different people? Would we still be able to answer our questions?*

Thomas addresses gaps in contemporary interpretations of how slavery articulates with colonialism (i.e., the legacy of black anti-colonialism or anti-colonial blackness) that can only be corrected if we become more deeply familiar with the body of scholarship that has produced what Diop predicted in *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (1959) — “[a] universe of tomorrow...imbued with African optimism.” Thomas implores us to pay more careful attention to how African thinkers like Diop talk about themselves and talk to each other about Africa(ns) outside of what Afro-pessimism (2.0) would have us believe is the totalizing gaze of Euro-American Enlightenment epistemology, or white supremacist humanism. “To think on the level of ‘Blackness’ and ‘Human Life,’” Thomas writes, “reinscribes the most imperial ‘American’ perspective on slavery and blackness instead.” If we are to believe, as Diop does, that there is an/Other there on that dark continent where neither our hegemonic claims about the human nor Afro-pessimism (2.0) go — what Williams describes as the space-time of an “event-horizon” — then we must, as Thomas does, approach Afro-pessimism’s account of the past and the present, including its refusal to hold space for the black futurity that Diop describes, with a deep skepticism. Thomas generously invites us to take the intellectual histories of thinkers like Sylvia Wynter, Amilcar Cabral, and

Anibal Quijano, and the geopolitical particularities of those histories seriously, to crank up our methods and approaches, and to read more painstakingly in our own archives. This is a hard challenge, to be sure, because the bridges to this body of work have been severed, in large public research universities and (as) in the world that must be undone. Thomas' capacious rendering of black demands for revolution reminds us that most of this generation of post-9/11 black scholars have never had the opportunity to explore a connection to who they are outside of the hyper-Americanism that is Afro-pessimism's frame of reference. As scholars of places that have experienced recent major demographic shifts like North Carolina, Florida, New York, and Houston increasingly produce accounts of the globalization and contemporary forced migration of black peoples (plural) who speak every language under the sun and who are subject to the most intersectionally complicated forms of structural oppression and political subjection, it becomes apparent that a rendering of history that borrows too heavily from the "slaver's history of slavery," specifically, from "one slaver's official 'national' or state history and discourse" risks further demobilizing the current generation. Diop's writings and ideas are not part of examination reading lists in graduate programs in critical theory, but perhaps, they should be, if we concede that Diop answers or at least approaches questions like, *What must Shaylene Graves' mother do now, one year after her funeral? What can we do to support Erica Garner three years after her father's death? What services can we render to the Mothers of the Movement over the next three years? What listening can we do for Redel Jones' children? What can we offer to Wakiesha Wilson's mother?* Thomas encourages us to plumb Diop's scholarship for what to say to these women and to the hundreds of thousands of other black people across the Americas and the world who have experienced profound loss but without the mass or the larger collective knowing their names. Certainly, Diop encourages us to assemble our tools for the revolution across geopolitical boundaries, especially if we are stage our attack from multiple fronts — which is to say, especially if we seek after the end of the world. In Thomas' hands, Diop, Wynter, Cabral, and Quijano — and Gloria Emeagwali and Ifi Amadiume — demonstrate for us how and why to rekindle "an array of revolutionary movements of praxis" that "global counterrevolution and counter-insurgency" efforts that "[remain] riveted on mere rhetorical proclamation and aesthetic or representational identification in neo-colonial culture industries here and there" have largely obscured and repressed at the cost of great loss of life. We might pause to ask if Afro-pessimism (2.0) similarly encourages us to forge collective weaponry with black peoples on the continent of Africa and elsewhere who like Diop believe in and agitate for black revolution. Or, does Afro-pessimism (2.0) implore us to give up "intercommunal" possibilities for a global black insurrection — or worse, to put down our weapons altogether?

Thomas' essay generates other questions, too—like, *What of Sand Creek and of the many ways that the authorizing gestures, first principles, and origin stories of white nations make nonblack peoples into flesh?* For Thomas, Wilderson's account of Sand Creek devalues the revolutionary logic and social power of "'Red-Black' maroonage all across the Americas." Prompted by Thomas, we might ask, *How different, really, is "the colonial utility of the Sand Creek massacre" from "the human race's necessity for violence against Black people"*⁹⁴ if both likewise atomize and consume the body of the other as raw material for "a specific white settler nationalist project" that is "the USA. construct of 'Americanism' (or 'amerikanism') and slaveocracy"? As Tiffany Lethabo King affirms in her contribution to this volume, the theft and conquest of native bodies, imaginaries, and land is mutually constituted with the making of the human/non-human binary that creates the slave. Thomas raises the question of 1865—a year that saw the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment and the continued massacre of Sand Creek—because 1865 is central to the ways in which Wilderson shores up an account of U. S. history as world history. Thomas finds the move to make this singular and particular history a history of the world disingenuous because "slavery's pseudo-abolition in terms of 1865 alone or any one date" preempts its continuation for another four decades in other settler colonial slave societies. "What of the official if spurious 'emancipation' dates for the rest of the black world of Africa's enslaved diaspora?" Thomas asks, offering up another date for our consideration—1804, in Haiti. The alternative genealogy of 1804 "[debunks] the 'Afro-pessimism' that thinks it can delink slavery and colonialism as two separate, even competing entities or issues,'" he writes. Thomas thus elaborates non-US contexts and perspectives to interrupt Afro-pessimism's claim to a global critique. Secondarily, his intervention contextualizes the antiblack violence typical of chattel slavery (and its afterlife) as a technology of the white nationalist settler colonial project.

But, let us say that we find value in Wilderson's move to project US history as the world's history; such a move is concerning for other reasons as well, not least of all because moving with it commits us to exhuming the history of Sand Creek in order to participate in the devaluation of the murder of the Cheyenne and Arapaho peoples—to say nothing of the fact that "there never appears a trace of any critique" in Afro-pessimism (2.0) of "gender... as a racial patriarchy" or of "black social class or (political class) elitism." Afro-pessimism attempts no "anti-colonialist mapping of the African continent," Thomas explains, and obscures Palestine's location "as the 'tip of Africa.'" As Willoughby-Herard elaborates elsewhere, it prohibits us from "tarrying with each other's dead,"⁹⁵ from tarrying fully with our own dead, and from learning from all the dead—that the dead can never be caught.⁹⁶ If the contributions of theories about social death—including

but not limited to Afro-pessimism's—are to illuminate anything, they must give up the intellectual habit of becoming intimate with other peoples' dead for no other reason than to mock the historical processes that made them. From the vantage point of non-being, the strategy whereby we move with those undead, too, seems far wiser, if one's proclivity is to inhabit life as the undead and to be haunted many times over. Thomas reminds us that it is important to offer accounts of mutual constitution of social and political status at the same time as we must offer detailed and fully rendered histories of distinctive groups. By his calculation, Afro-pessimism (2.0) makes such a task impossible, even/especially as it reveals the violence of analogy. Its critique asks "black people...to have an archive of suffering all to themselves"⁹⁷ in order to avoid the real risk of flattened comparisons over the nature of being and the ways in which antiblack violence has produced us—all of us, in a world that must be undone. If we take Thomas' claim that there is no slavery outside of colonial violence seriously, then perhaps we can begin to think about *how* the slave relation is somehow antagonistic to the relation that removes the native person from their land. Sand Creek is an example that confounds the binary of slavery's "necessity" and colonialism's "utility" because it demonstrates their mutual constitution—not just in this one case but in many or perhaps all cases, as Thomas avers.

Besides failing the affective and ethical obligation to tarry with each other's dead, and besides making use of this moment, time, and relation—Sand Creek, 1865—to undermine a systematic analysis of how blackness articulates with landlessness and forced removal from land, Afro-pessimism's approach reinforces vulgar and accumulationist racist and colonialist understandings of land. What would Afro-pessimism have us say to black people and to black women in particular who insist that the land and the ocean are living forces, and who insist that divorcing black people from the land and the land from people is precisely the farce of racial colonialism? These are people like Black Lives Matter Toronto co-founder Janaya Khan who—Malaklou writes elsewhere—"remind us that we must attune and orient ourselves towards the earth: the land, the water, indeed, the *matter* of the world, as opposed to the human civilization that feigns to control the earth," because "black life...[is] a kind of indigeneity...a kind of living *with* the land, not in sovereign control over a land on which black persons do not have a right to stand in the first place...but as a kind of co-existence with the land, as a commitment to freeing a land cultivated (violated) by institutions of settler colonialism and chattel slave labor."⁹⁸ It is this relationship with the land that motivates black women activists to take up arms and make revolution against transnational corporations. Keisha-Khan Perry's study of black women activists in the Gamboa de Baixo neighborhood in Salvador, Brazil,⁹⁹ for example, provides a

relevant counterpoint to Afro-pessimism's distinction between racist and colonialist logics, insofar as both are humanist projects. The latter requires humans to destroy the earth that sustains black life—all life—to make room for a world that sustains but one kind of life: the human's. The black women who Perry worked with and learned from are uncompromised/uncompromising; Perry recounts in *Black Women Against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013) that these women locked up, detained and chained, and forcefully held the owners of transnational utility companies hostage—not just because their communities needed access to water and electricity (they did and do), but also because of who they are as ecological beings in relation to the ocean. These women explain that restricted access to drinking water and to the ocean disrupts their spiritual connection with and reverence for the sea, their devotional practices within African and African diasporic religious traditions, and how those things shape who they are as black people. To put it plainly, these women would literally be unable to pray for the protection of their children if they were denied access to the land and the ocean. Perry explains that the land is a “religion” that “[organizes the] alternative meaning of their lives” and “[subverts] how they are understood in their society.” This religion “combines collective memory” and healthy environmental practices to create and sustain a black sociality tethered not to the world that must be undone, but to the earth. Its ceremonies use biodegradable materials to make sacred space and its practitioners scuba dive to clean the bottom of the ocean—indeed, think of the ocean not just as a natural resource but as what sustains their local economies and activates intergenerational memory and a claim to the land which is necessary to keep the movement going and manifest “cultural resources and collective land rights.”¹⁰⁰ *What else do the racial colonial legacies of forcible removals and landlessness for black peoples (plural) look like?* We might further consider decades of evictions from cities and rural areas in the aftermath of South Africa's Section Ten Laws, the demolition the Pruitt-Igoe Homes (and along with them, any hope of high quality public housing in the United States), the bombing and jailing of deep ecologists in the MOVE organization at Philadelphia's Osage Avenue, and the permanent displacement of millions of black families as a result of Hurricane Katrina. These histories evince a century and more of black exile from neighborhoods and cities all over the planet—some, by restrictive covenants premised on eugenics principles masked as sanitization laws. These are the *pre*-histories of all or part of what we call, in today's parlance, gentrification.

It is true that while flattened comparisons make a great strategy for political mobilization, they efface the particularities of anti-black violence at the same time as they crudely dismiss, to invoke Wilderson's example—Sand Creek, 1865— anti-Cheyenne and anti-Arapaho vio-

lence. It is here where Afro-pessimism must make room for a robust critique of comparative racializations. What other questions can this Afro-pessimism bring to bear to shed light on “black people’s experience with the after-life of slavery”¹⁰¹ which are not tethered to a practice of dishonoring the Cheyenne and Arapaho – as two examples, of many – and the political projects that made them into flesh? Indeed, to mention the loss of nonblack life primarily to say that it does not matter cannot be the ends we seek. Some may read this and respond that the moral dilemma we have outlined is not Afro-pessimism’s (though surely, it may be black feminism’s). Perhaps, *Afro-pessimism refuses to think with of all the other ideas that have been dubbed social life theories because every time we get too close to the black rage and the black wounds that cannot be healed, or to inexorable breaches like the status of black women as the arbiters of blackness itself – the stuff of social death – somebody starts singing a Negro spiritual or organizing an action or march, or talking about how our survival matters more than the people who we lost along the way, precluding any movement with/as the (un)dead.*

If Afro-pessimism’s task is to tarry with the dead and (as) the undead, then we might pause to name those we lost along the way and to reflect on the historical, philosophical, political, and representational projects that took them. Let us to return to Wilderson’s genealogy as a case in point. In 1865, the same soldiers who fought Texas Confederate soldiers in New Mexico were led by US army colonel John Chivington (1821–1894), a Methodist pastor and an opponent of slavery, into the slaughter of the Arapaho and Cheyenne people. Chivington’s racial views were quite like those of Brigadier General Wade Hampton III (1818–1902), one of the largest slaveholders on the Eastern Seaboard; he was a particularly vile patriot who cut his teeth in the conquest of autonomous Hawaii and then went on to found industrial training institutions – Hampton and Tuskegee – that would produce a replacement version of black abolitionism better suited for the needs of post-1865 conditions. This period of war and empire-building had mercenaries to call upon to serve in official and informal capacities as the captains of Jim Crow; which is to say, this time of colonial violence is not incidental to the history of antiblack violence and the meaning that is made of/from antiblack violence for white nationalist history as a tragedy, on the one hand, and as a necessary act of extravagant but unusual violence on the frontier, on the other hand. Those opponents of slavery who did not believe that black people were/are people also did not believe that Native American people – so-called “Indians” in the legislative discourse and journalism of the day – were/are people. They codified the non-humanity of black and red others as a way to secure their own white humanity. It would be these same nationalists who would be so offended by freedwomen exercising their rights and not satisfactorily taking up their duties and responsibilities as loyal

liberal citizens—and not internalizing all of that ideology about the blessing of emancipation and their duty to honor its promise—that they would unleash rape laws extending the life and spatial reach of slavery so that the treatment of black flesh as available (bodily/political/and social) wound could continue. (Remember Moynihan and Jefferson.) Thus, rather than widen the rift between our undead and the undead of those “Indian” others, we might alternately ask, as Aaron Goggans, a Black Lives Matter writer, activist, and artist does, “How might history [have] been different if, during Bacon’s Rebellion, enslaved Africans and indentured servants had united with the Doeg tribe instead of against it? What would have happened if the buffalo soldiers had joined with the tribes at war with the Union or refused to fight in their genocidal wars?”¹⁰² How might our present be different still, and how might we activate Diop’s “universe of tomorrow” if we imagine our pain and our pleasure—our promises of liberation—as coeval with not just those of Native Americans but with those of the indigenous peoples of the world, who have been stomped out by empire and slavery alike? Do they not seek after the world’s undoing, too? Can we not forge our tools with them? Who benefits when we refuse to think in this way, and under what conditions can thinking in this way disadvantage black people?

The collection of essays that make up this volume thus end where another collection might begin: *by supplanting the “both/and” of Afro-pessimism and black feminism with the “both/and” of colonial violence (i.e., the violence of white settler gendered nation-building) and chattel slavery’s violence (i.e., the violence of heteropatriarchal humanism and sexual imperialistic world-making)*. Greg Thomas’ essay, like M. Shadee Malaklou’s and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard’s single-authored essay, brings the colonial context of slavery’s afterlife—a modern world that requires from black people and especially black women their flesh—into the frame, but to draw different conclusions and arrive at different postures vis-à-vis Afro-pessimism. While Thomas critiques Afro-pessimism’s strict Americanism, for Malaklou, Afro-pessimism always already includes an anticolonial analysis, and for Willoughby-Herard, the plantocracy as a domestic colonial context, indeed, as the laboratory brought home so that Western medicine might create and learn the technologies “that advance the quality of (white) life,” betrays the violence of colonialism *as* the violence of ungendering black flesh. While Malaklou and Thomas similarly problematize Wilderson’s critique of “the ruse of analogy,” Thomas does so to admonish Afro-pessimism as a framework that not only cannot account for the making of nonblack flesh, but which brings further silence and pain to those violences. Malaklou, on the other hand, problematizes the “ruse of analogy” to elaborate Afro-pessimism’s critique of world-structuring antiblack violence as one that robustly anticipates the violence experienced by nonblack

persons. Malaklou's reading of Afro-pessimism is that it is a black feminism that equips us with not the Master's tools but with black radical and revolutionary ones, so that we might begin to inch towards the "event-horizon" Williams describes. Willoughby-Herard pushes through and past the theory-speak that might serve to distinguish Afro-pessimism's intervention from black feminism's, to ask how the biopolitical distinction between the "ontologically/civically/socially dead" and the "ontologically/civically/socially alive" has required black women to lay down their lives. Willoughby-Herard thus reminds us that the afterlife of slavery is colonialism's afterlife, too; and that regardless of whose terms we use to elaborate this world-structuring violence, the price of that structuring is black life and more specifically black women's lives. We might do well to remember these stakes as we tarry with the undead, seek after their intellectual histories, inhabit their promises of rebellion, and assemble the weaponry that will burn this house down.

Acknowledgements

The authors wish to thank the many anonymous reviewers who generously reviewed the essays (including this one) for this volume. They offered generative, heart-wrenching, and utterly necessary criticisms that result from lives of self-disciplined reflection and study.

Notes

1. This is contributor Selamawit D. Terrefe's phrasing in her included essay "Speaking the Hieroglyph."
2. "Pirate Jenny" is a song from *The Threepenny Opera* (1928) by Kurt Weill, with lyrics by Bertolt Brecht. Nina Simone sampled the song on the album *Little Girl Blue* (1957).
3. Assata Shakur, *Ode To My Mother*, September 7, 1998, available at <http://babazayid.blogspot.com/2017/07/ode-to-my-mother-by-assata-shakur.html> [n.d.]. This essay was penned by Shakur to commemorate the passing of her mother Doris Johnson.
4. Frank B. Wilderson III, qtd. in Shannon Walsh, "Afro-pessimism and Friendship in South Africa: An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson III" in *Ties that Bind: Race and the Politics of Friendship in South Africa*, Shannon Walsh and John Soske, eds. (Wits University Press, 2016).
5. Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World: A Note on Black Women's Labors," in *Afro-Pessimism: An Introduction* (Minneapolis: Racked and Dispatched, 2017) 89–90, available at <https://rackedanddispatched.noblogs.org/files/2017/01/Afro-Pessimism.pdf> [Accessed September 22, 2017].
6. Toni Cade Bambara, *The Salt Eaters* (Random House, 1992) 16.
7. Jared Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word" in *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* Number 29 (2016), available at <http://www.rhizomes.net/issue29/sexton.html> [Accessed June 28, 2017].

8. Fred Moten, "Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)" in *South Atlantic Quarterly* Volume 12, Number 4 (2013) 746.
9. Hartman, "The Belly of the World" 82.
10. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard's notion of "holding social life in the same frame as social death" is an example of this. Willoughby-Herard began writing about and lecturing on this topic in 2009, and published the textbook *Theories of Blackness: On Life and Death* (after some ten months of research) on this topic in 2011. While often un-cited, this text is one of the important locations where this idea and concept has been articulated.
11. See Appendix.
12. Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández, "Citation Practices Challenge Organizers" in *Critical Ethnic Studies* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, April 2015), available at <http://www.criticalethnicstudiesjournal.org/citation-practices/> [Accessed June 10, 2017].
13. Ibid. Eve Tuck, K. Wayne Yang and Rubén Gaztambide-Fernández cite Sara Ahmed in the aforementioned piece "'[describing] citation practices as a 'rather successful reproductive technology, a way of reproducing the world around certain bodies.'"
14. This is excerpted from Kumi James' *Letter from a Black Woman to the Students of Black Studies at UCI*, circulated by email to students and faculty at the University of California, Irvine on February 11, 2016.
15. To clarify, while Sylvia Wynter is invoked by some of the authors in this volume as a black feminist, she does not actually think of herself as a (black) feminist. In a 2006 interview with Greg Thomas, Wynter explains that she opposes feminism because it entrenches gender distinctions that are interchangeable with racial ones. Irrespective of what you call it—race or gender—both provide cover for the violences or "—isms" of Man, Wynter reflects, commenting, "It is not that I am against feminist: I'm appalled at what it became. Originally, there was nothing wrong with seeing myself as a feminist; I thought it was adding to how we were going to understand this world. If you think about the origins of the modern world, because gender was always there, how did we institute ourselves as humans; why was gender a function of that? I'd just like to make a point here that is very important. Although I use the term 'race,' and I have to use the term 'race,' 'race' itself is a function of something else which is much closer to 'gender.' Once you say [as Frantz Fanon does], 'besides ontogeny, there's sociogeny,' then there cannot be only one mode of sociogeny; there cannot be only one mode of being human; there are a multiplicity of modes. So I coined the word 'genre,' or I adapted it, because 'genre' and 'gender' come from the same root. They mean 'kind,' one of the meanings is 'kind.' Now what I am suggesting is that 'gender' has always been a function of the instituting of "kind." For example, in our order, which is a bourgeois order of kind, a bourgeois order of the human, the woman was supposed to be the housewife and the man was supposed to be the breadwinner. Each was as locked into their roles. By making the feminist movement into a bourgeois movement, what they've done is to fight to be equal breadwinners. This means that the breadwinning man and the breadwinning woman become a new class, so that the woman who

remains in her role becomes a part of a subordinated class. I am trying to insist that 'race' is really a code-word for 'genre.' Our issue is not the issue of 'race.' Our issue is the issue of the genre of 'Man.' It is this issue of the 'genre' of "Man" that causes all the '-isms.' ...Our issue is the 'genre' of the human. So when Black Studies came up, when this guy called for another order of 'truth' (because every genre has an order of 'truth'), what he was calling for was this. Now when I speak at a feminist gathering and I come up with 'genre' and say 'gender' is a function of 'genre,' they don't want to hear that. Look at the tremendous perks that feminism has given to some Black women, for example, and 'of color' women as they call themselves. Right? This is what I am trying to say about the temptations, you see; and then you say you're a 'Black feminist,' but what is happening to Black women?" See Greg Thomas, "PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter" in *ProudFlesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics, and Consciousness* Number 4 (2006) 23–25. Wynter's comments distance her from (black) feminism at the same time as they testify to why some of the authors in this volume invoke black feminisms and especially Wynter's writings to think about racial blackness as antagonistic to human be(com)ing. For a more careful consideration of Wynter's distinction between race, gender, and "genre", see Patrice D. Douglass, "At the Intersections of Assemblages: Fanon, Capécia, and the Unmaking of the Genre Subject" in *Conceptual Aphasia in Black: Displacing Racial Formation*, P. Khalil Saucier and Tyron P. Woods, eds. (Lexington Books, 2016) 103–125.

16. While their interventions, at least as the authors in this volume interpret them, are markedly (Afro)pessimistic, Hortense Spillers, Saidiya Hartman, and Sylvia Wynter do not actually name themselves as Afro-pessimists. Hence, while Afro-pessimism appropriates black feminist interventions to cohere an argument about the (social life of) social death—while black feminists are the original visionaries of Afro-pessimism's posture—black feminism is not similarly tethered to Afro-pessimism.

The essays herein also nod to cultural icons like New York's James Van Der Zee (1886–1983) and Senegal's Cheikh Anta Diop (1923–1986) as proto-typical Afro-pessimist thinkers, suggesting that Afro-pessimism's word has been around for much longer than its name.

17. Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Vengeance of Vertigo: Aphasia and Abjection in the Political Trials of Black Insurgents" in *InTensions* Number 5 (Fall/Winter 2011) 11, 10.
18. Ida B. Wells anticipated Sexton's argument about the constitutive exclusion of racial blackness from the expanding folds of racial whiteness, which is an argument that he develops in *Amalgamation Schemes* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2008)—Sexton reflects therein that the "only conditional exclusion" to the "[expanding] [...] boundaries of whiteness...is the exclusion of racial blackness" (75)—by more than one century. Franco Barchiesi elaborates that in her 1900 essay, "Lynch Law in America," Wells "reflected on the elasticity of white violence on the black body, a violence for which no obvious political or punitive justification existed. Her conclusion was that gruesome killings of blacks served the quotidian purposes of building the white community, its symbolic order, its gendered roles, and the racial hierarchies it presided over." See

“Trump, the event, the paradigm” in *Global Project*, November 21, 2016, available at <http://www.globalproject.info/it/mondi/trump-the-event-the-paradigm/20500> [Accessed April 6, 2017].

19. Audre Lorde, like self-proclaimed Afro-pessimists, advocates not for the world to be restructured to accommodate difference, but for new “blueprints of expectations and response” that might destroy the world to instead sustain “the earth that supports us.” Her argument that “the future of our earth may depend upon the ability of all women to identify and develop new definitions of power and new patterns of relating across difference” siphons Frantz Fanon’s call in *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) for the end of the world as we know it. See Audre Lorde, “Age, Race, Class, and Sex: Women Redefining Difference” in *Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches* (Berkeley: Crossing Press, 2007) 123. Afro-pessimist interlocutions suggest that such an end/beginning might make a space-time accountable to black Others, who share more in common with earth-matter—with the land that “breathes and births and engenders life even as human society depletes it of every possible resource with which to do so”—than with human beings endowed with a recognition that begets ‘inalienable’ rights. See M. Shadee Malaklou, “DAPL and the Matter/ing of Black Life” in *The Feminist Wire*, November 30, 2016, available at <http://www.thefeministwire.com/2016/11/dapl-mattering-black-life/> [Accessed April 14, 2017].
20. See M. Shadee Malaklou, “An Open Letter to Duke University’s Class of 2007, About Your Open Letter to Stephen Miller” in *Counterpunch*, March 24, 2017, available at <https://www.counterpunch.org/2017/03/24/an-open-letter-to-duke-universitys-class-of-2007-about-your-open-letter-to-stephen-miller/> [Accessed November 5, 2017].
21. Jared Sexton reminds us that ““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.” See “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism” in *InTensions* Number 5 (Fall/Winter 2011) 31.
22. Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement” in *Home Girls, A Black Feminist Anthology*, Barbara Smith ed. (New York: Kitchen Table: Women of Color Press, Inc., 1983), available at <http://circuitous.org/scraps/combahee.html> [Accessed April 3, 2017].
23. For example, Frank B. Wilderson III’s powerful critique of counter-hegemony in “Gramsci’s Black Marx: Whither the Slave in Civil Society?” in *Social Identities* Volume 9, Number 2 (2003).
24. See M. Shadee Malaklou, “On the Chronopolitics of Skin-ego: Antiblackness, Desire, and Identification in Bravo TV’s *Shahs of Sunset*” in *Rhizomes: Cultural Studies in Emerging Knowledge* Volume 29, “Black Holes: Afro-Pessimism, Blackness, and the Discourses of Modernity,” Dalton Anthony, M. Shadee Malaklou and Sara-Maria Sorentino eds. (2016); “On the Chronopolitics of Black Social Life, or How Mister Winfield ‘Sends Go’” in *Black Camera: An International Film Journal* Volume 7, Number 1, “Fugitivity and the Filmic Imagination,” James Edward Ford III ed. (2015); and *Chronopolitical Assemblages: Race/ism, Desire, and Identification in Iranian Contexts* (ProQuest, UMI Dissertations Publishing, 2016).

25. Dionne Brand qtd. by Jared Sexton, "On Black Negativity, or the Affirmation of Nothing" in *Society and Space*, September 18, 2017, available at <http://societyandspace.org/2017/09/18/on-black-negativity-or-the-affirmation-of-nothing/> [Accessed November 5, 2017].
26. Saidiya Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2007) 6.
27. See M. Shadee Malaklou, "'Teaching Trayvon' at Irvine: On Feminist Praxis, Afro-pessimism, and 'Woke Work'" in *National Political Science Review* Volume 18, "Challenging the Legacies of Racial Resentment: Black Health Activism, Educational Justice, and Legislative Leadership," Julia Jordan-Zachery and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard eds. (Newark: Transaction Press, 2016); and M. Shadee Malaklou's and Franco Barchiesi's collaborative in-progress essay, "The Anti-Pedagogy of Teaching Afro-pessimism: Undoing viscera, guts, and instincts."
28. Association for the Study of Black Women in Politics, "Scandal in Real Time National Conference on Black Women, Politics, and Oral History," May 11-13, 2016, University of California, Irvine, available at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQw7KTnzkpXeNrQs-jZHDCbkO3l-Wfbfr2> [Accessed August 4, 2017].
29. Caren Kaplan, Norma Alarcon and Minoo Moallem eds., *Between Woman and Nation: Nationalism, Transnational Feminisms, and the State* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1999).
30. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, "More expendable than slaves? Racial Justice and the After-Life of Slavery" in *Politics, Groups, and Identities* Volume 2, Number 3 (2014) 506-521.
31. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, "'The only one who was thought to know the pulse of the people'" in *Cultural Dynamics* Volume 26, Number 1 (2014) 73-90, available at <http://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0921374013510802> [n.d.]. See especially pages 74, 77, and 83.
32. Joel Hirschorn, "For the Love of Freedom" in *Variety*, June 19, 2001, available at <http://variety.com/2001/legit/reviews/for-the-love-of-freedom-1200468714/> [Accessed October 29, 2017]. This play, written by Levy Lee Simon and directed by Benjamin Guillory, is based on a trilogy about the Haitian Revolution. In one scene, enslaved Africans are literally dined upon as the actual food of their captors. We take our inspiration for this subheading from this scene.
33. "McGill: Feminist, Gender and/or Sexuality Studies; emphasis on Social Justice" in *Political Science Rumors*, available at <http://www.poliscirumors.com/topic/mcgill-feminist-gender-andor-sexuality-studies-emphasis-on-social-justice> [Accessed November 4, 2017].
34. Ibid.
35. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, "Mammy No More/ Mammy Forever: The Stakes and Costs of Teaching Our Colleagues" in *The Truly Diverse Faculty: New Dialogues in American Higher Education*, Stephanie Fryberg and Ernesto Martinez eds. (Palgrave Macmillan, 2014) 168-172.
36. Greg Tate, *Everything But the Burden: What White People are Taking From Black Culture* (Broadway Books, 2003).

37. Toni Morrison, *Playing in the Dark* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1992).
38. Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection: Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth Century America* (Oxford University Press, 1997) 4, 19, 21.
39. Alexis Pauline Gumbs, “m/other ourselves: a Black queer feminist genealogy for radical mothering” in *Revolutionary Mothering: Love on the Front Lines*, Alexis Pauline Gumbs, China Martens and Mai’a Williams eds. (PM Press, 2016) 21.
40. This is Alexis Pauline Gumbs’ phrasing in “m/other ourselves.”
41. See Angela Davis, “Reflections on the Black Woman’s Role in the Community of Slaves” in *The Massachusetts Review* Volume 13, Number 1/2 (Winter – Spring 1972) 81-100.
42. Alexis Pauline Gumbs invokes Hortense Spillers’ distinction in “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe: An American Grammar Book” (1987) of *motherhood* as a “status granted by patriarchy to white middle-class women, those women whose legal rights to their children are never questioned, regardless of who does the labor (the how) of keeping them alive,” to elaborate *mothering* instead as what happens when we “take the word ‘mother’ less as a gendered identity and more as a possible action, a technology of transformation.” See “m/other ourselves” 22, 23, original emphases.
43. Sexton, “The Social Life of Social Death”.
44. Christina Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies: Making Post-Slavery Subjects* (Duke University Press, 2010) 32.
45. *Ibid.* 60.
46. Greg Lambert, “The Caribbean Zola: Orlando Patterson May Be the Last of Harvard Sociology’s Big Thinkers” in *Harvard Magazine*, November-December 2014, available at <https://harvardmagazine.com/2014/11/the-caribbean-zola> [Accessed December 10, 2017].

Patterson insists that slavery made “reproductive associations” and “to call these units families was a sociological travesty.” Explaining Patterson and Moynihan’s friendship at Harvard University (though not Patterson’s loyal defense of Moynihan from the 1960s onward), Lambert writes, “Responsible fatherhood is a particularly sticky issue, one that Patterson has often addressed in his studies of African-American history and culture. Slavery in the American South, he says, left no legacy more damaging than the destruction of the black family – the relations between husband and wife, parent and child. Marriage among slaves was illegal, and slaveholders brutally broke slave families apart by selling off children or parents to other masters.” And, as Moynihan insisted, “the relative absence of nuclear families among black Americans, and the relatively large numbers of families headed by single mothers – both traceable to slavery and Jim Crow segregation – were a root cause of African-American poverty.” For some better accounts of these facts of slavery and their legacies in the struggle over the meaning of economic justice for black women than that offered by Lambert interpreting Orlanda Patterson, see Keona K. Ervin, *Gateway to Equality: Black Women and the Struggle for Economic Justice in St. Louis* (University Press of Kentucky, 2017) and Ange-Marie Hancock’s *Politics of Disgust: The Public Identity of the Welfare Queen* (New

York University Press, 2004). Hancock documents that Moynihan's and so many other "individual level behavioral approaches" and "individual level solutions" found support not just from Orlando Patterson but also from "civil rights leaders, including Martin Luther King, Jr. (SCLC), Roy Wilkins (NAACP), and Whitney Young (Urban League)...[shaping] Black attitudes toward single, poor, African American mothers, encouraging Black male chauvinism (Paula Giddings, *When and Where and I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, Bantam Books, 1984, 329) and hardening the lines of demarcation between the poorest African Americans and their more affluent counterparts" (58). Regarding this point – the failure of black m/others and the pitiable state of black masculinity – Patterson joins his black heteropatriarchal bunkmates in chummy cross-ideological concord.

47. See Jack Halberstam, *The Queer Art of Failure* (Duke University Press, 2011); and Matilda Bernstein Sycamore, *That's Revolting!: Queer Strategies for Resisting Assimilation* (Soft Skull Press, 2008).
48. Sycamore, *That's Revolting!*
49. Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (University of Minnesota Press, 2004).
50. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Duke University Press, 2016).
51. In her history of the National Welfare Rights Organization, Premilla Nadasen writes, "Moynihan's report...had a lasting impact on welfare policy. Moynihan's theories undermined much of what the welfare rights movement struggled for and contributed to a backlash against welfare. His analysis of the 'deteriorating' black family, i.e., single motherhood was the source of many problems in the black community, fueled criticism of AFDC, enabling conservative and liberal politicians and policy makers to demand a retrenchment in the welfare state. They argued that assistance from the government discourages two-parent families, promotes out-of-wedlock births, gives fathers little incentive to pay child support, and according to Moynihan's logic, leads to an array of other social and economic problems. These critics concluded that poor women should not have access to a source of income independent from men." See *Welfare Warriors: The Welfare Rights Movement in the United States* (Routledge, 2004, 145).
52. Qtd. in a public lecture by Frank B. Wilderson III at Omni Commons in Oakland, California on June 1, 2015, available at <https://vimeo.com/129677829> [Accessed June 12, 2017]. See minute mark 01:06:08.
53. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, *Waste of a White Skin: The Carnegie Corporation and the Racial Logic of White Vulnerability* (University of California Press, 2015) 135.
54. *Ibid.* 14.
55. See Grace Kyungwon Hong and Roderick A. Ferguson, "Introduction" in *Strange Affinities: The Gender and Sexual Politics of Comparative Racialization* (Duke University Press, 2011) 1–22.
56. Gumbs, "m/other ourselves" 22, original emphases.

57. See contributor Zenzele Isoke's included essay "Black Ethnography, Black(Female)Aesthetics: Thinking/Writing/Saying/Sounding Black Political Life," our emphasis. Globally, scholarship on racial democracies has foregrounded Black women primarily as workers and as wives and as mothers of movements against anti-blackness in policy and law. But, rearing and shaping the lives of their own children has been largely understudied. In contrast, we are interested in thinking about black mothering in a way that does not reduce it merely to the remnants of slavery that couldn't be erased. These more theoretical accounts of mothering, especially Isoke's and Gumbs', deconstruct certain white supremacist notions of motherhood. They challenge conventional notions about who can produce that kind of care and labor and assumptions that black mothering is always done by women. Katherine Cosby, personal conversation with Tiffany Willoughby-Herard (June 2, 2017).
58. This is contributor Selamawit D. Terrefe's phrasing in her included essay "Speaking the Hieroglyph".
59. See contributor Patrice D. Douglass' included essay "Black Feminist Theory for the Dead and Dying."
60. H.L.T. Quan, *Growth Against Democracy: Savage Developmentalism in the Modern World* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2012).
61. Carole Pateman, *The Sexual Contract* (Stanford University Press, 1988); Charles Mills, *The Racial Contract* (Cornell University Press, 1999); and Carole Pateman and Charles Mills, *Contract and Domination* (Polity Press, 2007).
62. Jared Sexton, qtd. in Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of US Antagonisms* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010), describes a libidinal economy as "'the...distribution and arrangement of desire and identification (their condensation and displacement), and the complex relationship between sexuality and the unconscious.' ... It is 'the whole structure of psychic and emotional life,' something more than, but inclusive of or traversed by, what [Antonio] Gramsci and other Marxists call a 'structure of feeling'; it is 'a dispensation of energies, concerns, points of attention, anxieties, pleasures, appetites, revulsions, and phobias capable of both great mobility and tenacious fixation" (9).
63. Joyce A. Ladner, *Death of White Sociology* (Black Classic Press, 1998).
64. Roderick A. Ferguson, "The nightmares of the heteronormative" in *Cultural Values* Volume 4, Number 4 (2000).
65. Fatima El-Tayeb, "Time Travelers and Queer Heterotopias: Narratives from the Muslim Underground" in *The Germanic Review: Literature, Culture, Theory* Volume 88, Number 3 (2013) 305-319.
66. Frank B. Wilderson III, "The Ruse of Analogy" in *Red, White, and Black* 35-53.
67. Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, "Mammy No More/ Mammy Forever" 176-181. See the Section, "On Blackness."
68. See contributor Greg Thomas' included essay "Afro-Blue Notes: The Death of Afro-pessimism (2.0)."

69. Saidiya Hartman, "The Belly of the World" 83.
70. See Jennifer L. Morgan, *Laboring women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* (University of Pennsylvania Press, 2004); and "Partus Sequitur Ventrem: Slave Law and the History of Women in Slavery," a workshop with Jennifer L. Morgan at the University of California, Irvine (2014).
71. Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" in *Diacritics* Volume 17, Number 2 (Summer 1987) 67.
72. Greg Thomas, personal conversation with Tiffany Willoughby-Herard (June 5, 2017).
73. See contributor Jaye Austin Williams' included essay "Radical Black Drama-as-Theory: The Black Feminist Dramatic on the Protracted Event-Horizon".
74. Ella Baker and Marvel Cooke, "The Slave Market" in *Crisis* Number 42 (November 2, 1935) 330–331, available at <https://caringlabor.word-press.com/2010/11/24/ella-baker-and-marvel-cooke-the-slave-market/> [Accessed July 6, 2017].
75. *Ibid.*
76. Furthermore, for Lindsey and Spillers both, family equals "making property" and using kinship ties of obligation and duty, and myths about the "private sphere" to mask the power relations that animate raw accumulations of wealth through designations of people as property. This alchemy of making kin into property is a lethal historical process that is used against black women for whom no corner of life is truly private and separate from white machinations and desires. The state that intervenes to give white families assistance, aid, defense, and comfort is defined and upheld by the quotidian and mundane violence that it wields over defenseless, unaided, and uncomforted black families. For Spillers, the desire to find and resurrect the pre-slavery family is a desire to suppress the "dehumanized naming" practices of captivity. King writes: "Spillers' claim that there is no Black family or kinship structure under the conditions of captivity or for those who live in the legacy of slavery is a precursor to the kinds of claims that contemporary Afro-pessimists make," insofar as this Afro-pessimism elaborates racial blackness as a natal alienation and admonishes black claims to the family as a recuperable organizing structure. One such claim about black family as recuperable includes pointing to the "slave community" as a group of captives whose sociality is marked by belonging to one another as a means by which to undercut their legal belonging as property to the planter class. King notes, however, that "belonging" to one another under captivity does not interrupt or confront the law-making, human-making, and human-unmaking regimes of captivity.
77. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother* 225.
78. This call/calling entreats us not just to abolish the black family as the site of pathological black matriarchy, *pace* Moynihan; it asks us to abolish "the family" altogether, insofar as the family is a generic, worldly, and therefore, antiblack concept. Black feminist and queer modes of critique

- model for King (Afro-)pessimistic and non-humanist “black sociality on [its own] terms,” without the baggage of the (white, nuclear) family. More specifically, they model for King “the possibility of naming and doing Black relations outside of the categories that currently name humanness.”
79. Jared Sexton qtd. in Frank B. Wilderson III, “Afro-pessimism and the End of Redemption” in *The Occupied Times of London*, March 30, 2016, available at <https://theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=14236> [Accessed May 6, 2017]; and in *Red, White, and Black 30*, n.10.
 80. Greg Thomas, “Pan-Africanism or Sexual Imperialism: White Supremacy, Hellenomania, and Discourses of Sexuality” in *The Sexual Demon of Colonial Power: Pan-African Embodiment and Erotic Schemes of Empire* (Indiana University Press, 2007) 1-23.
 81. Wilderson, *Red, White, and Black*.
 82. *Ibid.* 313.
 83. Sharpe, *In the Wake* 106.
 84. Hortense Spillers, “Interstices: A Small Drama of Words” in *Black, White, and in Color: Essays on American Literature and Culture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003) 76.
 85. Sexton, *Amalgamation Schemes* 149, original emphasis.
 86. See Jeanne Theoharis, “‘A Life History of Being Rebellious’: The Radicalism of Rosa Parks” in *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle*, Jeanne Theoharis, Komozi Woodard and Dayo Gore eds. (New York: New York University Press, 2009) 115-137.
 87. See Danielle L. McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance – A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Vintage, 2010); Monique W. Morris, *Pushout: The criminalization of Black Girls in Schools* (New York: New Press, 2016); Dayo Gore, “Reframing Civil Rights Activism During the Cold War: The Rosa Lee Ingram Case, 1948-1959” in *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2011) 74-99. Certainly, we would want to think from Chibok, Nigeria to Washington, D.C. and back again. See “Nigeria Chibok Abductions: What We Know” in *BBC.com*, May 8, 2017, available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-32299943> [Accessed July 19, 2017]. The Black and Missing Foundation provides a useful list of reports and journalism about the conditions of possibility that contribute to the lack of coverage of and normalization of missing black girls and women. See the News and Announcements Link at <http://www.blackandmissinginc.com/cdad/> [Accessed July 19, 2017].
 88. Combahee River Collective, “A Black Feminist Statement.”
 89. Qtd. in Sexton, “The Social Life of Social Death” 6, original emphasis.
 90. Spillers, “Mama’s Baby, Papa’s Maybe” 67.
 91. Sharpe, *Monstrous Intimacies*.
 92. Christina Sharpe, “Black Studies: In the Wake” in *The Black Scholar Volume 44*, Number 2 (Summer 2014) 63.

93. Diana Ramey Berry, *The Price for Their Pound of Flesh: The Value of the Enslaved, from Womb to Grave, in the Building of a Nation* (Beacon Press, 2017).
94. Wilderson, "Afro-pessimism and the End of Redemption," original emphases.
95. Willoughby-Herard, "More expendable than slaves?" 517.
96. See Flying Lotus featuring Kendrick Lamar, "Never Catch Me" in *You're Dead!* (Warp Records, 2014).
97. Willoughby-Herard, "More expendable than slaves?" 510.
98. M. Shadee Malaklou, "DAPL and the Matter/ing of Black Life."
99. Keisha-Khan Perry, *Black Women Against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil* (University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
100. *Ibid.* 148–157.
101. Willoughby-Herard, "More expendable than slaves?" 510.
102. Aaron Goggans, "Black Solidarity With First Nations Is Complicated, Sacred and Necessary" in *The Root*, September 12, 2016, available at <http://www.theroot.com/black-solidarity-with-first-nations-is-complicated-sac-1790856717> [Accessed July 15, 2017].

Appendix

An Introductory Reference List of Scholarship on Black Women in Political Science, with Particular Attention to Intellectual History and Political Thought

- Martha Ackelsberg, "Introduction: Contributions of Women Political Scientists to a More Just World" in *Politics & Gender* Volume 1, Number 2 (June 2005).
- Linda Martin Alcoff et al., *Singing in the Fire: Stories of Women in Philosophy* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2003).
- Nikol Alexander-Floyd, "Black Women Political Scientists at Work™: A conversation with Nadia Brown and Wendy Smooth" in *National Political Science Review*, "Broadening the Contours in the Study of Black Politics: Citizenship and Popular Culture," Michael Mitchell and David Colvin eds., Volume 17, Number 2 (Newark: Transaction Press, 2015) 97–16.
- . "Women of Color, Space Invaders, and Political Science: Practical Strategies for Transforming Institutional Practices" in *PS: Political Science & Politics* Volume 48, Number 3 (2015) 464–468.
- . "Radical Black Feminism and the Fight for Social and Epistemic Justice" in *National Political Science Review*, "Broadening the Contours in the Study of Black Politics: Citizenship and Popular Culture," Michael Mitchell and David Colvin eds., Volume 17, Number 1 (Newark: Transaction Press, 2015) 63–74.
- . "Why Political Scientists Don't Study Black Women, But Historians and Sociologists Do: On Intersectionality and the Remapping of the Study of Black Political Women" in *National Political Science Review*, "Black Women in Politics: Identity, Power, and Justice in the New Millennium," Nikol Alexander-Floyd and Julia Jordan-Zachery eds., Volume 16 (Newark: Transaction Press, 2014) 3–18.

- . “Disappearing acts: Reclaiming intersectionality in the social sciences in a post-black feminist era” in *Feminist Formations* Volume 24, Number 1 (2012) 1–25.
- . “Critical Race Black Feminism: A ‘Jurisprudence of Resistance’ and the Transformation of the Academy” in *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* Volume 35, Number 4 (June 2010) 810–20.
- . “Written, Published, ...Cross-Indexed, and Footnoted” in *PS: Political Science & Politics* Volume 41, Number 4 (2008) 819–29.
- Nikol Alexander-Floyd and Tiffany Willoughby-Herard, “Introduction: Nobody can tell it all: Symposium on How Researching Black Women in Politics Changes Political Science: Methodologies, Epistemologies, and Publishing” in *National Political Science Review*, “Broadening the Contours in the Study of Black Politics: Citizenship and Popular Culture,” Michael Mitchell and David Colvin eds., Volume 17, Number 1 (Newark: Transaction Press, 2015) 59–62.
- Gina Anderson, “Mapping Academic Resistance in the Managerial University” in *Organization* Volume 15, Number 2 (March 1, 2008) 251–70.
- Association for the Study of Black Women in Politics, “Scandal in Real Time National Conference on Black Women, Politics, and Oral History,” May 11–13, 2016, University of California Irvine, available at <https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLQw7KTnzkpXeNrqs-jZHDCbkO3lWfbfr2> [Accessed August 4, 2017].
- Lois Benjamin ed., *Black Women in the Academy: Promises and Perils* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1997).
- Michele Tracy Berger and Cheryl Radeloff, *Transforming Scholarship: Why Women’s and Gender Studies Students Are Changing Themselves and the World* (New York: Routledge, 2011).
- Michele Tracy Berger, *Workable Sisterhood the Political Journey of Stigmatized Women with HIV/AIDS* (Princeton, N.J.; Woodstock: Princeton University Press, 2006).
- Jacqueline Bobo, *Black Women as Cultural Readers* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995).
- Carole Boyce Davies, *Black Women, Writing, and Identity: Migrations of the Subject* (London; New York: Routledge, 1994).
- Nadia Brown, *Sisters in the State House: Black Women and Legislative Decision Making* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2014).
- Kia Lilly Caldwell, *Negras in Brazil: Re-Envisioning Black Women, Citizenship, and the Politics of Identity* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2007).
- Susan J. Carroll, “Reflections on Activism and Social Change for Scholars of Women and Politics” in *Politics & Gender* Volume 1, Number 2 (June 2005).
- Angela Davis, “Black Women and the Academy” in *Callaloo* Volume 17, Number 2 (1994) 422.
- Consuela Francis, *Conversations with Octavia Butler* (Jackson: University Press of Mississippi, 2009).
- Nomboniso Gasa, Human Sciences Research Council, and South Africa eds., *Women in South African History: They Remove Boulders and Cross Rivers = Basus’imbokodo, Bavel’imilambo* (Cape Town: HSRC Press, 2007).
- Dayo F Gore, *Radicalism at the Crossroads: African American Women Activists in the Cold War* (New York: New York University Press, 2011).

- Dayo F. Gore, Jeanne Theoharis and Komozi Woodard eds., *Want to Start a Revolution?: Radical Women in the Black Freedom Struggle* (New York: New York University Press, 2009).
- Duchess Harris, "Kathryn Stockett Is Not My Sister and I Am Not Her Help" in *JENdA: A Journal of Culture of African Women Studies* (2011).
- Melissa Harris-Lacewell, "Contributions of Black Women in Political Science to a More Just World" in *Politics & Gender* Volume 1, Number 2 (June 2005).
- Zenzele Isoke, *Urban Black Women and the Politics of Resistance* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012).
- Joy James, *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1999).
- Joy James and Ruth Farmer eds., *Spirit, Space & Survival: African American Women in (white) Academe* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
- Julia Jordan-Zachery, "'I Ain't Your Darn Help': Black Women as the Help in Intersectionality Research in Political Science" in *National Political Science Review*, "Black Women in Politics: Identity, Power, and Justice in the New Millennium," Nikol Alexander-Floyd and Julia Jordan-Zachery eds., Volume 16 (Newark: Transaction Press, 2014) 19-30.
- . "Reflections on Mentoring: Black Women and the Academy" in *Political Science & Politics* Volume 31, Number 4 (October 2004) 875-77.
- Brittany Lewis, "Yearning: Black Female Academics, Every Day Black Women and Girls, and the Search for Social Justice Praxis" in *National Political Science Review*, "Broadening the Contours in the Study of Black Politics: Citizenship and Popular Culture," Michael Mitchell and David Colvin eds., Volume 17, Number 1 (Newark: Transaction Press, 2015) 83-88.
- Shelby F. Lewis, "Africana feminism: An alternative paradigm for Black women in the academy" in *Black Women in the Academy: Promises and Perils*, Lois Benjamin ed. (University Press of Florida, 1997) 41-52.
- Heidi S. Mirza, "Black Women in Higher Education: Defining a Space/ Finding a Place" in *Feminist Academics: Creative Agents for Change*, Louise Morley and Val Walsh, eds. (London: Taylor & Francis, 2002) 142-52.
- Jessica Lavariega Monforti and Melissa R. Michelson, "Diagnosing the Leaky Pipeline: Continuing Barriers to the Retention of Latinas and Latinos in Political Science" in *PS: Political Science & Politics* Volume 41, Number 1 (January 2008).
- Louise Morley and Val Walsh eds., *Feminist Academics: Creative Agents for Change* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1995).
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- Keisha-Khan Perry, *Black Women Against the Land Grab: The Fight for Racial Justice in Brazil* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2013).
- Jewel L. Prestage, "In Quest of African American Political Woman" in *The Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science* Volume 515, Number 1 (May 1, 1991) 88-103.
- Naz Rassool, "Black Women as the 'Other' in the Academy" in *Feminist Academics: Creative Agents for Change*, Louise Morley and Val Walsh eds. (London: Taylor & Francis, 2002) 22-40.
- Evelyn Simien, "Black Feminist Theory: Charting a Course for Black Women's Studies in Political Science" in *Women & Politics* Volume 26, Number 2 (September 21, 2004): 81-93.

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- Cecile Wright, Sonia Thompson and Yvonne Channer, "Out of Place: Black Women Academics in British Universities" in *Women's History Review* Volume 16, Number 2 (April 2007) 145-162.