"We're trying to destroy the world"
Anti-Blackness & Police Violence After Ferguson

An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson, III

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This is a transciption of an radio interview with Frank B. Wilderson, III taped in October of 2014, in the midst of the ongoing anti-police struggles taking place in Ferguson, MO. Wilderson is in conversation with IMIXWHATILIKE hosts Jared Ball, Todd Steven Burroughs and Dr. Hate. An audio recording of the interview can be found under the title "Irreconcilable Anti-Blackness and Police Violence" on the show's website:
http://imixwhatilike.org/2014/10/01/frankwildersonandantiblackness-2/

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Cover image: *Riding With Death*, by Jean Michel Basquiat.

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JB – We want to start with a question that was posed to you during a Q & A at which we were present. Someone asked you a question about police brutality. You said, 'I'm not against police brutality, I'm against the police'. Can we start there, and can you reflect on the most recent goings-on in Ferguson, MO and the continued police violence against Black folks in the US and around the world?

FW: That was at Haile Gerima's bookstore in DC, and it was an all-Black audience, so I didn't have my guard up. I might have said it differently in a classroom, who knows. What I meant there was, well it was a bit tongue in cheek, but of course I hate police brutality. I haven't been brutalized in the past ten years, but when I was brutalized I did hate that. I hate the harassment However, I feel that what my critical work is trying to contribute is to say that Black people in the US and worldwide are the only people -- and I say this categorically -- for whom it is not productive to speak in terms of 'police brutality'. I know that we have to, because we're forced to speak in these terms, and there is a way in which all Black speech is always coerced speech, in that you're always in what Saidiya Hartman would call a context of slavery: anything that you say, you always have to think, 'what are the consequences of me speaking my mind going to be?' The world -- and this goes for *Democracy Now*, it goes for our post-colonial comrades, etc. -- is not ready to think about the way in which policing affects Black people. And so what we have to do is ratchet-down the scale of abstraction, so that we don't present the world with the totality of our relation to the police, which is that we are policed all the time, and everywhere. We have to give the world some kind of discourse, some kind of analysis in bite-size pieces that they are ready to accept, so that they can have some kind of empathy for us, some kind of political or legal adjudication. That is why police brutality becomes the focal point of the problem.

Police brutality has never identified our problem. Our problem is one of complete captivity from birth to death, and coercion as the *starting point* of our interaction with the State and with ordinary white citizens (and with ordinary Latino, Mexican, Asian citizens, Native Americans). And so when I was in that room and I said 'I don't hate police brutality, I hate the police', I think most of the people in that room immediately understood what I was saying, but also understood the problems with going outside and saying that.

Here's one little example of how this conundrum or paradox affects the way we can speak to White people and our so-called 'allies of color'. In Tulia, TX, in 1999, 45 Black people and about two Latinos were arrested in a one-night drug bust. In other words, roughly 10 percent of the Black population were arrested in one night. All of them were convicted. There is a film about this that people can find online. What's interesting to me is not the celebratory political and emancipatory nature of the film, which ends by saying, 'at the end of the day we were able to get most of the convictions overturned, because the undercover agent did not have evidence'. There was one undercover agent who indicted 45 Black people and two Latinos. But he did not come to court with cocaine. He came to court with this word. And what was interesting to me about that was that when jurors were interviewed about that, and people said to them, 'So you convicted these kids, some to 200 or 300 years, on no evidence, but on the word of one police officer. Would you want that to happen to your child?', one of the jurors said—without any sense of irony—'if it was my child, we'd need evidence'. So the problem then is not where the film situates the problem, or where the media situates it, i.e. in the *rogue actions* of the police. The problem is in the libidinal economy, which is to say in the collective unconscious of everybody else. And if we were to actually understand that better, we'd understand that Blackness is always-already criminalized in the collective unconscious. The only problem for white supremacy and anti-Blackness when it's happening to Black people in Mexico for example, is one of *logistics*, of *mechanics*, which is to

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say, 'how can we make the criminalization stick?' It's not a question of something wrong taking place, that these Black people are suffer or exist under police brutality. Policing—policing Blackness—is what keeps everyone else sane. And if we can start to see the policing and the mutilation and the aggressivity towards Blackness not as a form of discrimination, but as being a form of psychic health and well-being for the rest of the world, then we can begin to reformulate the problem and begin to take a much more iconoclastic response to it.

JB - This idea that there is a sort of necessity, for the quality of life—i.e. that the existence of an anti-Black perspective is life for those who are involved in the mutilating, torturing, terrorizing Black people...what's preventing Black people from understanding this? Some folks, such as Fanon, Frances Cress Welsing, etc., have attempted to grasp the psychic relation between the terrorizer and the terrorized, but most folks won't go so far as to say that there is a health and even a sense of pleasure in that libidinal economy for Whites to enact an anti-Black perspective. What's preventing folks from understanding that?

FW - Although my work is fine, I would really encourage listeners to read two Black authors, Hortense Spillers and Fanon's *Black Skin White Masks,* in particular for those moments where they are at a loss to address what they have come up against. What we tend to do -- and I'm not criticizing this, we have to help Black people make it through the day, which is the job of Black psychologists and Black psychoanalysts -- but we also need people like me, who point to the failures of what Fanon called the "healthy infrastructure of the psyche". And then I'd also suggest moving to the more uncompromising literature of David Marriot and Jared Sexton, who will deal with psychoanalysis but will not offer any cure.

Here's the deal: in a nutshell, every other group lives in a context of violence which has what I would call a sort of psychological grounding wire, which means that they can write a sentence about why they are experiencing that violence. Native Americans can write a sentence that says 'I'm experiencing violence because this is an ongoing tactic within a strategy of colonization'. White feminists can say the same, that 'this is an ongoing tactic within a strategy of patriarchy'. For a Black person to try and emulate that kind of interpretive lens, the problem becomes a lot bigger. For us this is the ongoing tactic of a strategy for human renewal. The violence against us becomes a tactic within a strategy to secure Humanity's place. It's not a tactic in an ongoing strategy to take our land away, or to take our rights away. We never had any rights.
The other thing is that our psyche does not obey the objective laws of the structure. The simple way of putting that would be to say that we exist in an external superviolence, and we exist in an internal soup which has self-hatred as one of its main components. One of the things that Marriot and Fanon each say is that, generically speaking, the structure by which human beings are recognized by other human beings and incorporated into a community of human beings, is anti-slave. And slaveness is something that has consumed Blackness and Africanness, making it impossible to divide slavery from Blackness. Even if I say to myself, "I am not a Slave", we don't make our own way in the world. So we know every day, before

walking out of the house—and I think the American Black knows it quicker, like say at age 3, the Caribbean and African Black might know it a little bit later on in life, like Fanon says, 'I was 18 when I learned it'—that we cannot enter into a structure of recognition as a being, an incorporation into a community of beings, without recognition and incorporation being completely destroyed. We know that we are the antithesis of recognition and incorporation. And sometimes we build to a point that we can't even call it political because it's bigger than politics, a point of mobilization and organization and theorization that is in some way informed by this, and we just set it off, and I think that Harriet Tubman, Nat Turner, and the Black Liberation Army are episodes of that. But the response to these moments, where we recognize that we cannot be recognized and we move on that, the response is so overwhelmingly violent that it doesn't seek to end the conflict -- say in Algeria or Vietnam -- it seeks to crush us to the point that nobody ever gets that idea in their head again.

Normally people are not radical, normally people are not moving against the system: normally people are just trying to live, to have a bit of romance and to feed their kids. And what people want is to be recognized, to be incorporated. And when we understand that recognition and incorporation are generically anti-Black, then we don't typically pick up the gun and move against the system, we typically try to find ways to be recognized, to be incorporated, even though that's impossible. And I think that our language is symptomatic of that when we say that 'I don't like police brutality'. Because, here we are saying to the world, to our so-called 'people of color allies' and to the white progressives, 'we're not going to bring all the Black problems down on you today. If you could just help us with this little thing, I won't tell you about the whole deal that is going on with us.'

TB: If we agree with your thesis, then what is the framework of resistance? How do we resist, either physically or psychologically?

FW: Your question makes me admit something. Whenever a Black person comes to speak to other Black people, it's incumbent upon the Black people who are listening to decide how useful this person is to me in what they are saying, and what aspects of my problem can what this person's saying address. I think more specifically, that professors are by and large categorically disqualified or unqualified to make pronouncements on resistance. I think that when Fanon talks about hallucinatory whitening, I think that whether you're talking like me, or like an afro-centrist, or an integrationist, that this is so much a part of what it means to be a professor. I feel like cussing people out all the time. But if I do that, and I violate University of California's civility laws, tenure or not I'm out the door, right? And that tempers my speech. So I think that what I have to offer is not a way out. What I have to offer is an analysis of the problem. And I don't trust me as much as I trust Black people on the ground. So having said that, that's one part of my answer.

The other part is that, as Saidiya Hartman has said, Black liberation presents us with the prospect of a kind of liberation that is so totalizing (i.e. that it is what Fanon says on page 100, quoting Aimé Césaire: 'the end of the world'), that it can't be ratcheted down and put into political language. If I'm right that the problem that Black people are in is not colonial exploitation and not racism but social death -- which is not to say that Black people don't experience racism and that Black poor people are not exploited, but that once all that's over, we're still going to be socially dead -- then I think that we actually don't have a political framework to deal with that, certainly not in Marxism, Feminism, and post-Colonialism. I'm writing about this now [1]. The beautiful actions of the BLA are bigger than the political discourse of Marxist-Leninism or New Afrikan discourse through which they tried to make sense of that. But as has been pointed out elsewhere, one of the problems that the BLA always had was that they were not only coerced by the police but were at the whims of white radical allies.

When Fanon says that the Black person is a 'stimulus to anxiety', and that this is very different from the Jew, since the latter is a stimulus to anxiety because of x, y or z: in the fantasy world of anti-Semitism, he or she is going to do well on all the exams, and there won't be any space for my kid in the French university; or they're going to take over the world economic system, etc. All that stuff, where you can put language to their anxiety, makes the Jew, the Native American, the post-colonial subject, a much more malleable phobic object than the Black. The Black is a phobic object because he or she presents me with a problem that is beyond language, that leaves me with no way to redress what this person represents. This person is the antithesis of Humanity. And there are moments in which we have seized that *esprit de corps* even if we are not able to speak to each other in that stark of terms, and we move. I mentioned a couple a few minutes ago. I think that we need to keep with those moments. I also think we need, in our political organizing, to be aware of how impoverished our articulated agenda is in comparison with the suffering that we actually experience.

Dr. Hate: Frank, nobody wants to respond to this [laughter]. *Because I think, literally what you just said, that we are unable to develop the articulation to speak to our suffering, I can't help but think that if we were to recognize this suffering, it wouldn't be spoken through thoughts or words, but might find a completely different type of expression. It might look like the body collapsing in on itself. So it might be expressing itself through our own diseases, since it is a question of health. It might express itself through unhealthy adaptations to terrorism and oppression. And it might be a matter of recognizing that those of us who have been courageous enough to respond to it are those that took action to respond to it, the ones that you named, the Harriet Tubmans and the BLA, the people along that line. But it's also recognizing that it can't get any worse, and so I have to fight. And that's kind of the perspective you took, when you saw people fighting in South Africa, and said 'I need to fight, because that's the only thing I can do that would make sense and make a contribution to the world'.*

FW: Yes, and I also want to say, since you are a Black psychologist, and my Father and Mother are as well, that I think that we need help on a daily basis. So if I emphasize a total end of the world, which is what I emphasize, I don't want listeners to think, 'Oh, well he thinks that what I'm doing is just peanuts or no good.' What I think that Black professors, psychologists and journalists can do is to provide a space for us to talk about the impossibility of Black life, and I think that is a revolutionary act and is highly significant.

I think two things are always happening. The Marxists -- and I'm not against Marxism, I believe that capitalist exploitation dominates the world and I'm against it -- but I think that all these progressive groups come with an orientation toward the problem that does two things: first, it crowds out what we have been talking about here; then, it polices the terrain of political discourse so that we can't get a word in edgewise about how there is no solution that can be thought of to Black suffering. They say: 'If you can't think of a solution then don't talk about it.' And if we can provide for ourselves what Hortense Spillers calls an 'intramural context' to talk about how the problem today is the same as it was in 1855 even though the technologies have changed, then that is something, and it can move us towards the next big moment in which we are able to set it off.

Dr. Hate: This rings true, and Black folks know this, cause after the so-called Katrina episode, and the so-called Gulf Coast War of the US, we didn't respond then, and it was the scariest thing to watch or not watch because we didn't have a pulse then to respond to the totalitarian wholesale State and Federal repressive violence against Black people. So the Ferguson moment feels good, as the struggle has been protracted in terms of how long the marches and demonstrations usually go on, and it's coming from a place in the States that we haven't paid attention to since like the East St. Louis riot in 1917 or something.

FW: Exactly

Dr. Hate: And I know that the left loves to talk about Justice Taney and Dred Scott and all that, but I'm like 'we have other mob violence that has occurred like 15 miles from Ferguson that we should be talking about. But the non-response is the piece that has been jacking me up, so I appreciate the idea that it's a revolutionary idea just to create the space just to deal with this.

FW: One of the things we need to deal with is the ways in which right reactionary white civil society and so-called progressive colored civil society really works to sever the Black generation's understanding of what happened in the past. So right now, pro-Palestinian people are saying, 'Ferguson is an example of what is happening in Palestine, and y'all are getting what we're getting'. That's just bullshit. First, there's no time period in which Black police and slave domination have ever ended. Second, the Arabs and the Jews are as much a part of the Black slave trade—the creation of Blackness as social death—as anyone else. As I told a friend of mine, 'yeah we're going to help you get rid of Israel, but the moment that you set up your shit we're going to be right there to jack you up, because anti-Blackness is as important and necessary to the formation of Arab psychic life as it is to the formation of Jewish psychic life.'

I believe that looking at it from an anti-capitalist perspective, from an anti-White supremacist perspective, the Palestinians are right—*provisionally*—until they get their shit, then they're wrong. So this is a historical thing: what we have to do is remind each other, to know our history in terms of slavery and our resistance to it, but also to be able to have x-ray vision, and say that just because we're walking around in suits and ties and are professors and journalists doesn't mean we're not slaves. That is, to understand things diachronically. And that will allow us to be in a coalition with people of color, moving on the system with them, but ridiculing them at the same time for the paucity — the *lameness* — of their desire and demand. And

We are FERGUSON
We are GAZA, because
We are HUMAN

for the fact that we know, once they get over [their own hurdles], the anti-Blackness that sustains them will rear its ugly head again against us. So that we don't fall into a sort of genuine bonding with people who are really, primarily, using Black energy to catalyze and energize their struggle.

In Ferguson, we can see the problem: so many people in the streets declaring 'I am Human too!' And there it is: the symptoms of a Black recognition that we are up against something much larger than just police brutality, much larger than poverty and discrimination, that we are still unconscious. As we're marching in the streets and angry and a reporter comes and sticks a microphone in our face and we yell 'I am Human too!', if that's the first words out of so many peoples' mouths, then the unconscious is trying to tell you something about the real nature of your oppression, that even you can't handle. And I say 'you' meaning me too, because I don't like to think about this all the time and I write about it. But what Ferguson is doing is providing a space in which Black youth (youth primarily, because I'm sorry to say that I'm almost 59 years old and most of the people my age are not contributing to this dialogue in the way that I would like them to) can use their skepticism and their anger to say, 'wait a minute, I'm not going for the oki-doke from Al Sharpton, who says "don't riot cause this is not about you". What do you mean "this is not about me"? And what do you mean "don't riot'"? Are you about dealing with this situation, or are you giving this speech as another form of Black anger management?'

JB: The point you've just made sounds so different from what a lot of the left has been saying in response to Ferguson and in general. And this applies to a lot of well-meaning radical people in this country and around the world. And when you make the point that, as John Henrik Clarke_ used to say it, that 'African people are an unobligated people'...

FW: Yes

JB: ...like we don't owe anybody anything. And everybody has in one way or another, in some ways very much equally, taken their turn and their time to exploit us in one way or another, including, as you just said, exploiting the continued struggle of African people in this country for their own causes, at least temporarily, and then once they get their shit together they turn right back around and join the long line of anti-Black oppressors. I almost don't know where to go with that, because one of the things that have caused me and others problems, when we start to look at the condition of Black people in the US, and we don't see any help coming, it's almost like we need to reach out to find people around the world to link up with. And then unfortunately we're let down when their anti-Blackness takes hold again.

FW: We're having two conversations here, and both are really important. One conversation is about...ok so I spent 8 years as a stock broker. And that was like 8 wasted years of my life. However, I can't honestly say to my Black daughter and granddaughter that if you renew your life, and go to South Africa and become a political activist and revolutionary that you will see the end of Black social death, that you can even think or write coherently about it. Jared Sexton once gave a paper, and someone said to him afterward, 'you're talking as if Black people don't have any reason to get up in the morning', and he replied, 'no I didn't say that in my paper. What I said is Black people don't have any *good* reason to get up in the morning'.

[Laughter]

FW: And I know that when I'm getting fat, I'm super depressed. And I know that when I'm working on my weight that I'm thinking more about these issues and I'm getting some kind of joy in thinking about them and discussing them with other people. But my huge weight fluctuation doesn't mean that when I'm thin and sick, that the world has gotten better for me as a Black person. I have to keep reminding myself that I am struggling for something for which

there is no coherent articulation. Now, I think that is part of—for lack of a better word—political education. So yes, better to be politically active than to waste 8 years as a stock broker. On the other hand, there's a reason that Marx in Vol.1 of *Capital* did not think that the slave was the quintessential subject of liberation, that rather the worker is. He said that the slave is a 'speaking implement'. If we keep this in mind, -- and not that I necessarily always think this about myself, however, I don't want to be naive to the point of thinking that there's going to be some group of people out there, whether it's Indians, or Latinos, or Asians, who are going to think of me as other than a speaking implement. If I can remember that in the collective unconscious or libidinal economy of all others I am just a speaking implement, then I can move through my association with these people with a greater sense of ridicule, owning both my solidarity with them and my antagonism towards them, so that I'm ready to pounce on them the moment they get what they want. I think that contributes to my sanity, and maybe my madness since I might want to do more, but it's something that I think is important. [...]

FW: Many years ago, right before George Jackson was murdered, Angela Davis was being interviewed by a journalist, who asked her: 'George Jackson has said that America is a fascist state. Do you agree with that?' And what's important here is the next thing that she said, because this is the moment where we see how the Black psyche is coerced by the hydraulics of terror. She said that, 'if I were to say as Jackson did that America is a fascist State, the only way I can say that is if there were some outside force that was ready to come in and deal with it', and she referenced the Americans and the allies going into Nazi Germany, bombing the hell out of it, and turning it into something other than a fascist state. So what I'm trying to say here, and this is something that happens to all Black people including myself, is that you're faced with this person who wants something coherent from you, so her mind moves from the question, which is a question of pure analysis, 'is this fascism?', and shifts over to the register of Lenin's question, 'what is to be done?'

What her unconscious here had done at that moment is to realize that the totality of the fascism we live in is beyond what I can think of as redress. So let me then corrupt my own analysis, and say that this is not fascism, so that I can have some kind of speech act about what is to be done. She avoided the question, or the unconscious made a switch from pure analysis to '*ooh, let me come up with an answer*'. This is what happens to us all the time. If we can help Black people to stay, as Saidaya Hartman says, 'in the hold of the ship', that is, to stay in a state of pure analysis, then we can learn more about the totality and the totalizing nature of Black oppression. And *then*, move into a conversation about what is to be done, realizing that our language and our concepts (post-colonial, marxist discourse) are so much a part of other peoples' problems, problems that can be solved, that we'll really never get to the thing that solves our problem — because it's already there in Fanon: *the end of the world* — because at least if we don't have a strategy and tactics for this end of the world, at least we will not have altered and corrupted our space of pure analysis to make it articulate with some kind of political project.

JB: I'd like to come back to this issue of inter-racial/ethnic/geographic unity, and this point that I think you were making will cause some leftist spines to shiver. Like, 'wait a minute, we can't just close our eyes and unify with the Palestinians?, or this or that other group'?' So, how specifically might you treat the predictable response from the student in the classroom or the activist in the rally who says, 'that sounds crazy to me. We have to, as a matter of necessity, seek to expand our circles because no one's coming to save us. There's nobody coming to bomb this place into an actual democracy, or bomb this place into a community that is, if not fully pro-Black, then one that's not so anti-Black. So what do we do?'

TB: It seems like you're also saying that our frustration with coalition is psychologically normal and healthy.

FW: Oh yeah. Because the coalition is, from the jump, an anti-Black

formation. It's just that, it hasn't figured that out yet. But if you stay in there long enough, you will figure it out.

JB: I had a moment like this myself. You know, you look to go join up with the ISO [International Socialist Organization] *or some other white radical group, or rainbow group, and you start to feel it happening. So many people have had this experience of organizing with white radicals. But here you add Arabs and Palestinians, and here you're going to (appropriately) send shivers up some spines. And I fully agree with what you're saying, but can you help me respond to folks who won't right away?*

FW: One of the things that they're gonna say to you — even if it's not in these words, it remains the framework through which they try to discipline Black people, e.g. Sartre said it to the Negritude movement and to Fanon — is: 'you know, this whole thing about Blackness, is really narrow, and it's not allowing you to see the bigger picture. And so we begin to feel bad, because we don't want to be narrow or people who don't see the bigger picture. That's what politics and struggle is all about, i.e. developing a theory of struggle that can be generalized. Now, it takes some work, and the work at an intellectual level is hard, but it's probably more difficult at an emotional level, and you might just break down, ...but one of the things I would say to respond to this person is: 'how is the paradigm of colonialism, or the paradigm of Marxism more essential than the paradigm of anti-Blackness and social death?' And this is very difficult for American activists, because American activists don't read, they just go out and say, 'do we break Starbucks windows, or do we not break Starbucks windows?', that's the extent and level of their intellectual politics. So, here I'm shifting the weight from me to the other person, to actually explain to me their theoretical apparatus. Not just explain to me what this action in this moment is going to do. And normally, when it comes down to it, you find that their theoretical apparatus works along about four different vectors. One would be the post-colonial vector: 'my theoretical apparatus is that colonization has done x, y and z'; or

else, 'capitalism at the site of the wage relation exploits everyone universally'; or, 'ecologically, we will have no world if x, y or z happens'; or, 'we are all suffering under patriarchy'. But then if you ask them, 'how did Black people become part of the *We*?', a breakdown occurs here, since the structure of their desire is formulated on a conception of community that is *a priori* anti-Black. So that they're not actually thinking in terms of the ways in which we suffer. And in fact, their political projects will liberate one terrain, and intensify our suffering more by being parasitic on our inability to speak and on the Black energy that we lend to their questions and which crowd out an analysis.

But there's a good reason why they come to this: because they can't stand before you and say, 'I am, in my being, unethical'. They would rather say, '*No! Afropessimism, and those moments that cannot be resolved in Fanon, for example, all suggest that I am as much the antagonist as much as the cop or the capitalist, that I am unethical in my being. And I refuse to accept that! You, Black person, must demonstrate to me that I am unethical in my actions.*' Yet, they wouldn't hold any other paradigm of oppression to that high of a bar. They wouldn't say that the White French people living in Algeria have to be destroyed because they are unethical in their actions. They would say that they have to be destroyed because they are present, because they are *here*. They wouldn't say, 'Well you know, there's some good capitalists and some bad capitalists.' They would say, 'the capitalist as a category has to be destroyed'. What freaks them out about an analysis of anti-Blackness is that this applies to the category of the Human, which means that they have to be destroyed regardless of their performance, or of their morality, and that they occupy a place of power that is completely unethical, regardless of what they do. And they're not going to do that. Because what are they trying to do? They're trying to build a better world. What are we trying to do? We're trying to destroy the world. Two irreconcilable projects.

[...]

Listen, I share Angela Davis' frustration at that moment when the European interviewer says, 'can you speak of fascism?' We're always calculating, 'what can the non-Black person in our life handle? How much of the shit that I'm carrying around can I handle?' And if you don't do that calculation, you don't have a job.

[Laughter]

JB: Or you don't have a life.

FW: Precisely. I think if we can find a language for that paradox, something beautiful can come of it. I haven't been well lately, but some of my students went down to Ferguson with the California contingent. I wish I could've gone with them. Anyway, I was saying to them how disappointed I was by the Black response. But I was seeing this response on *Democracy Now!,* and my students were saying 'no, no no!, that's not what was going on, there was real tension between ministers doing their anger management and Black youth wanting to take it directly to the police!' There was all this conversation about Black suffering that we didn't see, that was being *channeled*. What are the biggest channels? The biggest channels are on Pacifica, which is the best option we have, but still—also against us—it channels by analogizing Black suffering with something else, [...] And that makes no sense [...] The libidinal economies [of White supremacy against Blacks versus against Native Americans or Middle Eastern people] cannot be reconciled, even if the violence looks similar. And so what my students were saying was that on the ground you were seeing something that you weren't seeing even on the progressive news media, which was the bubbling up of young Black people being willing to live with, articulate and discuss this paradox. And if we can do that, we can still fight for folks to get their land back, and still fight for folks to, you know, get green cards and immigration, and all these demands that ultimately help civil society, *and,* at the same time, have an understanding that they are our next target. [...]

TB: Are you saying that there is no such thing as a Black demand that another Human being could hear? Or are you saying that there no such thing as a Black demand because Blacks are not Human beings so they don't get to have demands in the collective psychology...what do you mean by that?

FW: I think I mean a little bit of both. In rhetoric, there are laws of discourse to which a demand must adhere in order for it to have an auditor. The auditor of the demand must recognize and incorporate the spatial and temporal coordinates of your demand. Let me give an example. The Native person in Canada can say, 'You put my child in these Indian schools, and my child comes back 20 years later and the language is lost, and our customs are lost.' And the Canadian government says, 'Yes, but that was for your own good.' So what takes place here is a point of post-colonial oppression, but there is still recognition and incorporation, because the Canadian government is saying, 'Oh yes, your child had a language and a culture, a set of temporal coordinates that I recognize.' And the same with the Palestinians: 'I had this place, this spatial place that was lost. So I point to a prior plenitude, a point prior to Israel in which I had spatial integrity.' And the Israeli Defense Force says, 'Yeah, that's right, but we conquered your ass.' Ok, so that's horrible, but what's still happening is a recognition of the spatial coordinates of that demand. There's no such thing as a Black person making a demand in space or in time that would have an auditor out there, because the collective unconscious is not ready to accept that Black people had something that could have been appropriated, which is to say that the collective unconscious is not ready to accept that Blacks are Human. If that were to happen, the collective unconscious would say to himself, 'Ok, if I politicize the demands of Blacks, if I were to recognize the Black body, this would be a body that has lost something, whereas now in my mind the Black body is just a mass of 'Flesh'' [as Hortense Spillers put it], a space and time of absence.[2] If I recognize the Black body as having lost something that it had prior to my oppression, then what does that mean for me? I lose my integrity as a human.' As Jared Sexton has point-

ed out vis-à-vis the bi-racial movement, what gives it its coherence is not what it says about itself, i.e. 'we are mixed race people', but what it says about what it is not: 'we are not Black'. If Blackness enters into bi-racialism, if Blackness enters into post-colonialism, then those things lose their most defining capacity. We're faced with the end of the world. We can't have auditors. Why do they respond to us? Because they have put forth a discourse that opposes their discourse, like communism opposes capitalism, or post-colonialism opposes colonialism? No. They respond to us because of the danger of our movement. It's that mass of Black youth in Ferguson, and not the speeches of Black politico's, and certainly not of Black ministers that is causing a response. The response expresses the fear of Black violence. But that doesn't mean that they responded to our discourse or to our Humanity. They responded to our threat.

Dr. Hate: The work that we do in the clinic is one thing. But the moment we step outside, we are greeted by police, by [...] a society that is perfectly happy for us to die.

FW: Even sociologists who don't agree with my Afropessimist conclusions will nonetheless point out that we today are living in a state of greater captivity than we were in the 1860's. It seems like 1 in every 6 Black people are somehow incarcerated. That is a pandemic. We're living in more chains today -- through lockdowns, ankle bracelets, halfway houses, that kind of thing -- than we were in the early 1800's. That's something to think about, when people tell you that progress has come along.

NOTES

1. See Wilderson's article, "The Black Liberation Army & the Paradox of Political Engagement". Available in zine form at ill-will-editions.tumblr.com

2. For a longer version of this argument, see Wilderson's article, "The Prison Slave as Hegemony's (Silent) Scandal", *Social Justice*, Vol 30. No.2, 2003.

"[They say to us], *You, Black person, must demonstrate to me that I am unethical in my actions*. Yet, they wouldn't hold any other paradigm of oppression to that high of a bar. They wouldn't say that the White French people living in Algeria have to be destroyed because they are unethical in their actions. They would say that they have to be destroyed because they are present, because they are here. They wouldn't say, 'Well you know, there's some good capitalists and some bad capitalists.' They would say, 'the capitalist as a category has to be destroyed'. What freaks them out about an analysis of anti-Blackness is that this applies to the category of the Human, which means that they have to be destroyed regardless of their performance, or of their morality, and that they occupy a place of power that is completely unethical, regardless of what they do. And they're not going to do that. Because what are they trying to do? They're trying to build a better world. What are we trying to do? We're trying to destroy the world. Two irreconcilable projects."