

## ALTERNATIVE METHODS AND HISTORIES

### Interviews on Critical Race and Trans/Queer Approaches to Filmmaking: Incommensurabilities—The Limits of Redress, Intramural Indemnity, and Extramural Auditorship

Frank Wilderson III and Cecilio M. Cooper in Interviews

#### PART I: Frank Wilderson III interview with Cecilio M. Cooper

CMC. What made you decide to begin filming *Reparations Now*?<sup>1</sup>

FW. I was in my last year of grad school. It was something like 2004. I was working a lot of odd jobs and came into repeated contact with people like Wanda Sabir, who's in the film, and a college instructor at Alameda Community College and N'COBRA (National Coalition of Blacks for Reparations in America). N'COBRA was a reparations-oriented black political organization. I was very interested in the concept of what it would take to repair us, black people, as slaves. People like David Marriott, and Saidiya Hartman, and [Hortense] Spillers, and Jared Sexton, had put forth this idea of "absence" as being the essence of black suffering, as opposed to "loss"; and reparations [depended] on a concept of loss, on a concept of having had something that was taken away. Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death* gave us a way of thinking about slavery as an abstraction; as a relational dynamic.

The bane of studies about slavery up to this point was the fact that scholars *thought* they were describing slavery, when in point of fact what they were doing was reporting on the experience of being a slave. Patterson is the first person to come along and correct this, much the way Karl Marx was the first person to come along and intervene against the empiricism of economists who *thought* they were describing political economy, when in point of fact, what they were doing was reporting on empirical events of political economy. Patterson's book, *Slavery and Social Death* defines slavery as

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a relational dynamic. And he identifies three constituent elements which define slavery at every historical period and in every society which had slaves. Slavery, Patterson's research shows, is not forced labour (although slaves are often forced to work); nor can it be defined by the fact that slaves are in chains (although slaves were often in chains); nor can it be defined as unwaged work (although this is, indeed, a common experiential reality of slavery). Patterson argues that slavery, at the level of a definition that holds across time and space, is "social death." And social death has three constituent elements: general dishonour, natal alienation, and naked violence, or what Hortense Spillers and others have characterized as openness to gratuitous violence.

Now, where I and other Afropessimists depart from Patterson is in his assertion that all groups of people can *become* slaves. This is not a statement that we disagree with. It's the fact that Patterson includes black people in this. In other words, we would argue that there is no *before* slavery for blackness—no prior moment of freedom, or social plenitude. In his description of slavery, Patterson talks about it in terms of a narrative progression. In other words, he argues (correctly, I might add) that every ethnicity and social formation has either enslaved people or been slaves. He talks about being "recruited" into social death: in other words, one is a captive in a battle. Prior to this moment one was not considered socially dead by the world. But at the point of capture one is given the "choice," physical death or social death. So, that's one way. Another way is to be caught in a dragnet while minding one's own business. This would be the way Patterson might describe what happened to Africans during the Arab and, later, the European slave trade. We wouldn't argue with the empirical evidence. But we would use Patterson's own brilliant definitional correction to refute this argument: in short, black people were socially dead to the world *prior* to the round-up.

Again, Patterson uses words which signify a narrative progression, such as "recruitment" and "recruit." These words fit in, perfectly, with a narrative of loss—so they ring true for social formations that have *experienced* social death at one or another point in history. But our argument is that the word "Black" as that which denotes a social formation does not have an existence prior to its imbrication with social death. Around the time I was checking out N'COBRA, and preparing to make the film *Reparations* . . . *Now*, I was beginning to face this contradiction. And, I was beginning to face myself, someone in his late forties, still a student, getting varicose veins working in a bookstore—all this coupled with the fact that there wasn't a moment in Blackness prior to social death; that our suffering bore no analogy to the suffering of other oppressed people. Even if they had *experienced* slavery. That's a long-winded answer to say that I was becoming hyperaware of the paradox between what N'COBRA was saying about how to redress slavery in a quantifiable manner and a deepening sense that not only can we not quantify the loss, but we can't use the language of loss to talk about what happened, and is happening to us. There was a tension between that and a sense of insanity that I think all of us feel, as black people. And that insanity stems from not being able to have a heritage of loss, which is what every other person has.

**CMC.** The opening of the film includes Abbey Lincoln's "Down Here Below." What about the song (lyrics, performance, etc.) resonated with the film's themes?

**FW.** When I first heard Abbey Lincoln sing that, I said to myself: "Well this can't be a song like most ballad singers from that era, about love that was lost, or the rejection of a lover." It really sounded to me like a song about the sense of being Black in the twentieth century, and feeling oneself as still in the hold of the ship. I wasn't really sure that that's what she meant by that, because there are other singers who I listen to, and I'm kind of an aficionado of a certain kind of black female ballad singers from this period, 1955 to 1975, so I like Gloria Lynne, Sarah Vaughan, Carmen

McRae, and Nina Simone, and Abbey Lincoln. In my youth, in college the 1970s, only Nina Simone would come to campuses and sing in an overtly revolutionary way. So, when I heard Abbey Lincoln sing “Down Here Below,” I wasn’t sure she meant it the way I *heard* it; not until I saw a video, where Abbey Lincoln talked about the lyrics exactly as I had imagined they should be described. She began speaking about the trauma of slavery, in the present tense, meaning, it’s about what we are going through *now*, how we suffer, *now*. Yes, empirically, it has strong resonances with the past, with the Middle Passage, but it also *explains*, lyrically, the slave *relation*, which is a constant, even after the chains come off. And she was also crying as she was explaining what the song is about. I was pleased to know that how I had interpreted the song was aligned with Abbey Lincoln’s intentions.

**CMC.** I’m glad you brought up tense. I’d been thinking about time within the song and throughout the film’s narration. There are things happening with the tense of the prose in both the monologues and voice-over. When the narrator opens, he communicates using repetition. He relays a story about a past event with present tense verbs to an absent interlocutor. How do you address temporality in the film? How does time structure the narrator’s testimonies, interviews, the film’s pace, etc.?

**FW.** In graduate school, Jared Sexton once told me that for Jacques Lacan there is no time in the unconscious. So as I am retelling a past incident of racial profiling, I am also saying—through a persona who is also me—that this event is not something that happened in the past; in effect, it had happened before it happened and is happening now, as I speak. All this is another way saying that for a black person it’s not a question of whether one will be marked as a criminal, but a question of when. The happening itself is timeless.

One of the things that I want to say is that I’m really thankful for all of your questions. Some of them are actually showing me more about what’s going on in the film than I actually understood myself.

To give you a little footnote, I was so involved in film theory from 1997 to 2004 when I finished my dissertation, and I wanted to engage film in a different way, as something other than an object of critique. Charles Burnett came to UC Berkeley in 2004 and he led a workshop for a small group of black graduate students; we were to go out and make a short film. And I was also at the same time taking an extension class at UC Berkeley with my wife, Anita, on documentary filmmaking. So I was really trying to get my hands working in film, and to think about some of the ideas I was thinking about theoretically, and not just be a film theorist. A year later, I had raw footage for *Reparations . . . Now*, and I also scripted my monologues and footage of the interviews. I edited it with the help of a major editor, Leticia Houston. It was important to me that she be a black woman to edit this film. Leticia saw possibilities of using jump cuts in the interviewee’s testimonials. I think it worked well.

Again, my monologues were scripted and were very different from the interviews of Wanda, the college instructor, or Caroline or Adrian, respectively the homeless woman who sells *Street Spirit* newspaper and the UC Berkeley undergraduate. Those interviews were all spontaneous. I wrote my monologues without making me as the director look like he completely understood slavery as social death. I wanted him to not completely understand slavery as social death—I wanted the *film* to understand that. I wanted him to struggle, like most of us do, with the fact that we cannot find an empirical ballast to anchor our notions of slavery to.

The opening monologue was really about something that had just happened. I was in beautiful north Berkeley where I lived and going to my chichi laundromat. This White woman rolled up on me as

I'm folding my clothes and just started saying "I know you've been coming here to steal these clothes." [*laughter*] I was so paralyzed, because here I am, with a lot of facial hair, long hair, 215 pounds, 5'10," and if I'm going to stand up for my rights? I don't think so. In the end I'm going to look like the aggressor. So, I purposefully let her harangue me so people would be aware that I was the one being attacked. Then a Native American woman said, "Actually you're accosting him." And it really wasn't until that Indian woman said, loudly, "He didn't do anything, you just picked him out and you started yelling at him," that I began to stand up for myself in that laundromat.

In the direct address, my persona is breaking the fourth wall and trying to tell a story about that incident in the laundromat.

It's interesting that you should bring up the issue of repetition in the three opening vignettes, when I'm talking to the spectator about the laundromat incident. When you said that I was "talking about a past event with present tense verbs, and there is an absent interlocutor"—yes. Your question has made me understand something that I didn't understand when I was making the film: that in those three vignettes I'm speaking to a non-Black person. Well, I knew what I was doing but I only now really *know* who I was speaking to.

I'm trying to get somebody who is not Black to have empathy for what it means to be Black in this world; and the third time, I realize that this can't happen because black speech has no auditors. It's as though we can't be injured. Injury is that which happens to another species. And it takes some rhetorical scaffolding, some outside supports—to say, as in the Native American woman in the laundromat, "Hey, he is not the imago, he is an innocent washer of clothes"—before that speech actually has any auditors. This is what is happening as my persona is trying to tell the story; the only difference is that unlike in the laundromat, on screen I have no human scaffold, like the Native American woman's coming to my aid. On the screen there are no human supports, so the persona just gives up.

**CMC.** How different audiences are hailed by the direct address or are able to witness the interviews seems to be tied up with the frames through which people articulate their claims. These could be claims for reparations, justice in a broad sense, or even rethinking a statute of limitations on criminal offences. Can you say more about how you—outside of the film and in your life as a student—were wrestling with these questions about slavery? Given that people say that slavery has been over for so many years and black people need to get over it, how do you deal with these incongruent ways of dealing with loss . . . or something more extreme than loss? I think they're definitely addressed by your interviewees.

**FW.** Can you say a little bit more about what you're saying there? I'd like to know a little more about your thoughts and then I'll say something.

**CMC.** I suppose it's the idea that the losses or voids, more acutely, that emanate from antiblackness, from social death, are not quantifiable in any kind of chronologically coherent way. We can also wrestle with how people think about redressing transgressions or consider what form reparations can take. Forty acres and a mule, for example. When you start trying to do the math involved in remunerating the true costs, the numbers cannot add up. The black speakers in the film seem to principally engage a black interviewer. However, these conversations happen in the context of documenting their experiences negotiating with non-black people over these questions. So it's a kind of a testimony to these failed interactions between black people about redressing black deprivation.

Even in the black intramural interactions, black people's failed experiences of trying to grasp at a grammar percolates in the film.

**FW.** Yes, yes, yes. I think you've said it better than I can say it. That's very helpful. One of the ideas you brought up was the impossibility of quantifying black loss, the paradox of measuring absence. What I find is that when showing this film in a room in which there are over 80 percent black people, the black people in the audience are able to engage the film in a discussion which has a kind of form that Jared Sexton might call psychoanalytic, in that the discussion is seeking to express and unpack a unique grammar of suffering (social death) without monumentalizing the collective ego with narratives of recovery or resurgence, without trying to find a way to monumentalize the ego, without searching for a way to make black flesh whole. That's probably the most rewarding kind of exhibition experience for me. Why it's the most rewarding is because the way we treat each other, whether it's intra-black class—I don't want to call it warfare, because we're not entities—but you get what I mean, it's class conflict, or gender or sexual orientation conflict, those are all ways in which we as black people find what Sexton calls "borrowed institutionality": a way of attempting to *be* in ways that we can never be.

It's only by destroying a black person in our midst. Where the real work would be to a) accept that subjectivity is what happens parasitically on us, and in contradistinction to us, and so we should be able to find a way for all of us to be worthy of our suffering and wallow in that contradiction. In the next move, b) would be an analytical condemnation of all those people who do have the capacity to be subjects. And I feel that when this film is shown in a room that is at least 80 percent Black, that those kinds of things can happen.

But I've showed it at Stanford once. Only 10 percent of the audience was Black. And, during the Q & A it became clear to me that they were not comfortable with the film, or with themselves. It was as though they were watching themselves being watched by the non-black people in the auditorium. So, they, quite understandably attacked me and the film as being depressive and even divisive. They said the film was a real downer. And some of them chastised me for my negativity. But I don't blame them for the way they jumped out of a bag, I blame Stanford. What must happen to the chemistry in the body if one thinks one is being watched? They must have felt watched. I understand that.

And it became very clear to me that black people who were there—young adults, eighteen, nineteen, and in their early twenties—were desperately in need of salvaging their identity and presence and their social and economic capital that they felt had accrued to them because they were students at Stanford.

What went down is the lights came on in that space at Stanford and I expected to have the great black-dominated conversation that I'd just had up the road at the Grand Lakes Theater by Lake Merritt, where it was 80 percent black people. Instead, the *Black* folks at Stanford were angry at the depiction and said it was demoralizing and depressing. And I was shocked, because that was the same response that I got in Orange County when it was shown to a group of white senior citizens in the extension school at UC Irvine. One woman at UC Irvine, a white retiree who spent her working years as a high end corporate lawyer, asked me condescendingly—but thinking she was being helpful—had I ever seen *Eyes on the Prize*? And didn't I think I should have made an uplifting movie like *Eyes on the Prize*. "Because your film is a real downer." Well it's the same thing that the young black people were saying at Stanford, and I really believe that it's because it's very hard for black

people to inhabit these multiracial spaces particularly like the Bay Area, where there is a pressure on the entire gathering to universalize the way in which we imagine suffering. These settings produce crowding out scenarios that prohibit the exploration of social death, black suffering.

**CMC.** No that works, that works. I'd like to now ask you about the *mise en scène*—the film's scenery, set design, and art direction. The actor's costuming during the first monologue complements what's happening in the story that he tells. It also seems to visibly accentuate the failure of certain kinds of "borrowed institutionality" like class or gender in the case of the first speaker. It harkens back to how I imagine your exhibition experience with the black students at Stanford. It seems like you are speaking to their fraught position in the film. The speaker's carriage in the opening sequence is echoed in the staging of the third and fourth monologue. There's the preppy sweater over the shoulder, the non-fat latté, there's a patterned background, this initially cocky presentation, and then the image in the frame dissolves. It seems that the director anticipates black challenges to the film rooted in the borrowed institutionality inflected by wealth with these editorial decisions. Would you agree with that?

**FW.** Yes, completely, completely. When I write memoirs and stories I try to find the places where I would be embarrassed and then embarrass myself even more [*laughter*]. Nikki Giovanni was once asking James Baldwin "How can you write about your father?" And she was saying she didn't believe she could write about her father. And Baldwin said "When the book comes out, it may hurt you [in this case, he means his father], but for it to hurt you, it had to hurt me first. I can only say as much about you as I am willing to say about myself. And that has happened to anyone who has ever tried to live." I've thought about that quote for many years. There are two aspects to it. If you're saying something about someone else, you're saying something about yourself. But many writers shy away from the second aspect. I realized that I was brought up as that person who believes that he's an extraordinary middle-class black person who can be heard because of those extraordinary accoutrements of class, gender, and sexuality.

So, in the opening monologues I'm also trying to deconstruct that; for example, the subtitles when I have my cashmere sweater on, wearing penny loafers. The caption beneath my image reads, "Dr. Wilderson, a Negro Filmmaker." [*laughter*] This is all about fungibility—Blackness is fungible; a fungibility that this persona, the director of the film, cannot accept, because he's invested in the idea that he has agency as a subject. But by the time we get to the third monologue, we find that he comes to realize that the world isn't going to see him as being anything more than that which was expressed to Fanon as he rode the train in France: "Look, a Negro!"

**CMC.** I want to also ask you about the demographic scales at which the film addresses reparations. Wanda Sabir talks about us being Afrikan in a pan-ethnic collective sense. Adrian talks about black students specifically on the UC Berkeley campus. Caroline was also broad about it, but the filmmaker specifically invokes his nuclear family. I wanted to ask you about how the idea of community, kinship, and family trouble the capacity for reparations given that the filmmaker articulates ideas through both patrilineal and matrilineal lines in non-identical ways.

**FW.** Tell me more about the patrilineal and matrilineal lines as they are working for you, because I'm not sure I theorized that as I was making the film, but I might have intuited it.

**CMC.** I'm also intuiting. The captions "Negro," "same Negro as last time," and the anecdote about how "we were Negroes in 1962" reference changes in racial terminology and the politics of naming.

Negro circulated before African American, Black, or black American became fashionable. But thinking about the politics of naming also brings to mind the story about how you acquired your last name, Wilderson. It's inherited from your father's side of the family, who acquired it in an almost arbitrary way. I believe your story was that the overseer mandated that people on one side of the street get one name while those people on the other side got another. According to heteropatriarchal convention, progeny inherit their father's surnames. The anecdotes about your mother, on the other hand, chronicle how she was raised in a debutante ball and that she wrote an open letter to her white neighbours. These are spoken alongside family photos. Some are intact, but there is also a torn, amputated photo of a male figure. To me, these things abstractly percolate around black matrilineality and patrilineality in the film.

**FW.** Yes, even though “black family” is always a term under erasure—a form of what Sexton calls “borrowed institutionality,” which is to say no institutionality at all . . . even though this is the case, you're right, my slave name comes from my father's lineage of incarceration, *his* family's plantation, if you will. And so the film is also guilty, at some level, of this sense that patriarchy, heteronormativity, and filiation are indeed operative, when the evidence shows that they are not. But there are also images and aporias that work to disrupt this illusion; the still photography, for example: family photos that are torn or with people literally cut from the image or, for example, the photograph of my father, the torn, amputated limbs of a male figure. Making the film helped me realize that the violence against Blackness is a kind of terror that is really impossible to make empirically coherent.

At first, I wanted to get this point across by using lynching photographs from the book *Without Sanctuary*. Thank god for Saidiya Hartman! She told me “Don't do that!” for all the reasons that we know from the first part of her book *Scenes of Subjection*: the repetition of the spectacles of mutilation and violence against black people has a pleasurable affect for viewers; a form of pleasure (like seeing black people beaten and shot and mutilated in Hollywood movies) that *instantiates* antiblackness with an intensity that eclipses the pedagogic effect one had hoped the images would have.

Somewhere along the line, my wife, Anita, and I were going through all sorts of other photographs to use, ones that could take the place of the lynching photographs. And she said, if we could portray absence through the way in which we edit and display the still photographs, we might get the same effect as we had hoped for with the spectacular violence of the lynching photographs. I'm not sure my father would be happy about the way we've cropped, if you will, the photograph of him in his late twenties.

**CMC.** One of the most compelling lines of the film was spoken by Caroline when she talks about this “hate look.” She says, “I know most of you blacks have seen this look, how most white people look at you, this hate look.” I find that fascinating. It brings me to the journal editors' prompt for this special issue: What are the political implications of using a camera? So much about antiblackness is expressed through the visual realm. Media forms like photography, film, and video became perfected through ethnographic representations of African-derived people. Then also, in terms of filmmaking, work like D. W. Griffith's *Birth of a Nation* comes to mind. So I wanted to know what you thought about being a black person actually using the medium of film, which has been such a technological instrument used rhetorically to convince audiences to disparage blackness and emplot our senses of self in relation to that disparagement. It teaches us all how to look and hear each other and is implicated in rendering black people abject. What does filmmaking open up? What, for you, are its limits? How does it enable your exploration of reparations with regard to antiblack visuality?

**FW.** That's a very good question, I'm not sure if I can answer it. But let me approach in a roundabout way. Throughout various segments of *Black Skin, White Masks*, you get various *kinds* of Frantz Fanons. For example, there's the Fanon of disalienation. In fact, this is the Fanon, Fanon the psychiatrist, to whom the *intent* of the book is probably most consciously aligned. It's also the Fanon that I appreciate the least. This is Fanon the Healer, the Fanon who says, "I'm going to cure my white wife, or the white prototype, of her White superiority complex; and I'm going to cure myself, the black prototype, of hallucinatory whitening through a process of psychoanalytic intervention." His main objective as a healer is to provide the black psyche with what he calls a "progressive infrastructure."

Now, in my own work, I've decided to do a hijacking of Fanon and of Lacan by saying that what Fanon does for us is show us why a progressive infrastructure of the psyche is actually dependent on antiblack violence, even as he tries to use psychoanalysis and psychiatry to bring that about. Fast forward to 2000, and David Marriott writes *On Black Men*. In the first chapter, on photography and lynching, he intimates two contradictory things. One, can there really be a black unconscious if desire in the black psyche is always overdetermined by the question: What does this white person want of me? And he follows that up later in the book in "Frantz Fanon's War." In both chapters Marriott is asking, "Can we even call the black unconscious an unconscious?" He also says something to the effect of he wants to provide a progressive infrastructure to the way we look at lynching. So that's a laudable desire coming from someone whose writing I trust more than Fanon's writing itself. And so what I see by that is that he does have pictures of lynching in that article, but he's built around it a scaffold of critique, a meta-critique, which disturbs the way in which one—the way in which you or I—would look at a lynching photograph and find it irresistible. As opposed to saying, "That's *someone* in a tree," it would be, "That's *me* in a tree." He's saying that if we provide a progressive infrastructure, which is a critique that shows how the mutilated body actually produces white community and how it is essential to the development of human capacity, as opposed to thinking of lynching as being a discriminatory act, then maybe that interrupts in some way the immediacy of the psychic identification.

So I kind of hoped that *Reparations . . . Now* would do something like that, because I do believe antiblackness is a construct. But I don't believe that film, or an article, or a series of psychoanalytic sessions is going to have transformative capacity for black people in the way that it does for the working-class subject or the non-black woman or LGBT people who are not Black, where the problem is the problem of counter-hegemony: anti-gay, anti-trans, anti-worker, anti-woman hegemony that can be countered by hegemonic incursions. I think that ultimately an ocean of violence of the same magnitude that created the situation is required to undo it. But I *do* think that intra-black discussions do *something*. And I would leave it at that, at the "dot dot dot," the ellipses between "Reparations" and "Now." *Reparations . . . Now*: I don't know what it does, but it does something.

**CMC.** Could you speak some about your lighting choices? For example, you shot in black and white vs. colour. Certain sequences also feature lighting effects and heavy shadow.

**FW.** In the documentary filmmaking class, the teacher thought that colour would bring more life and movement to the film if it was just going to be three or four talking heads with close-up shots. I really resisted that.



I did all the interviews of black people about their *experience* just by myself. So all the camerawork was done by me, lighting, everything, because it would be impossible for the interviewees—Wanda, Caroline, and Adrian, and even myself—to speak to *two* people on the other side of the camera, one who is Black (me) and one who is white (Anita), without being aware that they were speaking to a mixed audience. I wanted the interviewees to forget the racial dynamic of a mixed race film crew (or the audience members who would later see their testimonies) and to speak Black-to-Black as much as possible.

Everyone had their preferences as to where they wanted to be interviewed, and I adhered to that. Caroline wanted to do it where she worked, on the street, selling *Street Spirit*. Wanda wanted to do it at the College of Alameda, but do it in a private room. Adrian said, “If I’m going to tell these stories, I’m going to need about three or four drinks.” [laughter] So we drank wine in my apartment. Especially when I talked to him beforehand, when I realized where what he had to say was going—the murder of this little girl in Las Vegas—that needed to be much more intimate and in a darker surrounding not so much for a spectator—this is bringing me way back—but for him and for me. So that I darkened the room as much as possible in that shot, so he could speak about these things. And I should say that each of these interviews was about two hours long. I tried to make these encounters as intimate to the people as possible and that meant no crew. Just me and the interviewees. Of course, it helped that I had a prior relationship with all three of them. Caroline and I had done political work on the streets of Berkeley against storeowners who were calling the cops on people panhandling outside their door. Wanda and I had been at the College of Alameda together and we might have crossed paths at N’COBRA meetings. And Adrian and I knew each other from UC Berkeley.

**CMC.** You seem to be incorporating things that—from what I recall from the reparations conversations at the time—seem beyond their scope. This includes sexual violence and the effects of trauma on the body. Both Wanda and the narrator remark upon this in the film. There’s a point where he says, “I can’t do this anymore,” exasperated. His voice falters and there’s a change in his posture. He deflates. Wanda talks about experiencing anxiety or panic attacks and describing sensations in her body. Do you think that these invocations of black embodiment already fell neatly within the scope of reparations organizing then? Or, by including them, are you troubling the normative framework of reparations? Are you intentionally interrogating how embodied experience figures in way the reparations’ demands have been articulated, heavily inflected by black Marxist/radical traditions? I’m trying to better understand why the white Berkeley student’s assault and murder of the black girl figure so significantly here.

**FW.** Thank you for that. “Reparations Now!” was emblazoned on the t-shirt N’COBRA had. I wore that t-shirt a lot in the late 1990s. It was the word “reparations” and the word “now” with an exclamation mark. This is precisely what I did with the title and what the film does—whether I was knew I was doing it or not. It disturbs the Marxist notion of economic reparations as being an adequate form of redress. The meetings for N’COBRA had to do with: “What is the best way to quantify what happened to us?” As though a number could be put on it, the absence of being, and as though it’s a problem of the past. You know, “What is an acceptable sum, figure, amount of property, for redress?”

Jared Sexton used to say, “I will talk to you about crime and I will talk to you about punishment, but I will never talk to you about crime and punishment together.” He wanted to separate these two conversations, which Americans typically lump into one conversation. The common sense linkage

between punishment and crime has as its base the assumptive foundation that the state, the United States in particular, is ethical and all that needs to happen is for us to work out strategies to realize its ethicality. But if you separate crime and punishment, then you can actually have a critique of punishment and the state's right to do it—you find yourself able to focus on state power rather than “criminals” as a problem for the state. And a critique of crime (sans the anxiety over punishment) allows for a more comprehensive critique of capitalism, at the very least, if not antiblackness. By separating the two conversations, by forcing the interlocutor to enter into a different framework of discussion, suddenly the state and civil society become “criminal,” for lack of a better word, and we stand a better chance of discussing the ethics of power rather than the morality of individual behaviour. In my use of ellipses between “Reparations” and “Now” I wanted to distance the problem from the putative cure. I didn't want a film about solutions. I wanted a film about the problem—one for which our epistemological universe avails us of no coherent solution.

Slavery did not *happen* in the past; it was *happening* now. I wanted to get at, not directly or analytically but symptomatically, the ways in which you cannot analogize black slavery to any other form of loss. It was between the late 1700s and 1840 that 389,000 black people were bred like cattle into four million people. In a milieu of this magnitude of sexual assault, words like rape and sexual violation lose their salience in that kind of situation. And it also means that something has happened in the libidinal economy—the collective unconscious and the world, which is still with us. In other words, Wanda, who is having a panic attack and whose stomach is hurting, and Caroline, who says, “It hurts, it just hurts,” because the hate's there, and Adrian who has lived his college years (what for most people are the best years of one's life) with “no protection against the storm”—in other words, these people are living a kind of total vulnerability that the Marxists would tell us had gone away with 1865.

And it's also something else. What other groups experience through the state is a kind of fear—a fear that if I cross the border, I'll be sent back; a fear that if I don't act like a proper heterosexual woman I'll experience violence or I'll be ostracized. It's always *if, if, if, if, if*. But I think that what we as black people live through is not fear, but terror. Terror cannot be sourced psychoanalytically—it's affective, rather than emotional; terror is not what happens to us in sketchy situations, terror is the air we breathe. We have these interviewees who are differently gendered, and differently classed, and they all live day-to-day with a sense of terror; their psychic relationship to the world hasn't changed since the nineteenth century. And what that implies is a structure of violence unlike the capitalist structure of violence or the patriarchal structure of violence. Hegemony is not in play here. What we have instead are pure relations of force.

**CMC.** The last thing I'll ask you is this: The narrator's final sequence ends with a direct address. He turns his head towards the camera and says, “Now you know.” After having taken us on this journey—and this is in 2005—what is it that you would want different parts of your audience to know? And what do you know now that you didn't know then? Is there anything else you'd like to add?

**FW.** [*laughter*] I need to be honest with you. I see my work as an academic and as an emerging filmmaker as being parasitic on certain institutions in order to labour in such a way so that I can foster intramural conversations between black people about our suffering. So I'm not sure that I want any non-black person to know anything. [*laughter*] Which is odd, because so many non-black people—in Europe, in the States, and in Canada—have picked this film off of Vimeo and used it in their classes. They are seeing pedagogic value in it. A film like this can only educate preconscious

registers of the mind and it cannot educate the unconscious, because the unconscious goes on faith, not analysis. (Well, let me say that we can't *know* how the unconscious is being informed or transformed by this film.) Though what I do think is that we as black people need and appreciate interventions that allow us to talk about what we're going through without analogizing it to what other people are going through. And that sounds like a really simple thing. I'm sixty-two years old. If I can die and people at my funeral are able to say, "He shat on the inspiration of analogy" [*laughter*], or "He shat on the very inspiration of the personal pronoun 'we'"—I mean write *that* on my tombstone—I would consider myself having had a satisfactory, a successful life. [*laughter*]

## **PART II: Cecilio M. Cooper interview with Frank Wilderson**

**FW.** You've had quite a sweep in terms of your life trajectory and your professional career. You have been a performance artist, a filmmaker, and an activist. Throughout the entire time, you've always been an intellectual. Maybe you could give the reader a brief idea of the sweep and arc of your career, from artist to where you are now.

**CMC.** When I arrived in the Bay Area, I was a college dropout. I had spent the years prior involved in student organizing at the local and national level. Ultimately, I became disillusioned with higher education and withdrew. Then I spent time working at Planned Parenthood, labour unions, and LGBTQ nonprofits. In hindsight, I think these failed experiences of trying to do political work or advocacy in coalitional contexts indelibly informs the analysis I have now.

Washington, DC was still home when I first flew out to perform for a San Francisco arts festival. I relocated to Oakland and eventually enrolled at Mills College. The fall after graduating with my bachelor's degree, I began PhD coursework. My undergraduate focus on ethnic studies and intermedia arts intellectually complemented what I was trying to explore onstage. My entrée into performance came through queer nightlife: gay bars and queer parties, being a drag king, and doing burlesque. I found myself drawn to addressing sociopolitical questions through performance while divesting from providing entertainment. Queer nightlife led to the more formalized art scene. The Bay Area art establishment is very multicultural. Its funding and priorities are bound up with surrounding educational institutions. In terms of getting into film or video, it was me trying to experiment and use a grammar that was different from writing prose in a linear and cogent way. I tried to more abstractly wrestle with some of the issues I was failing to fully capture onstage.

**FW.** You've made two films that pack a lot of punch. One is called *Uncle Samima Wants U* and the other is called *SHADOWPLAY*. I can see how your theoretical work on the ontological status of Blackness as being void of a narrative arc has either explicitly or implicitly informed your choices, with respect to cinematic and narrative strategies. And I do want to ask you about that. First, maybe we could discuss something to ground the reader. Neither film is structured in a kind of traditional narrative way, but we sense that you're making a direct political comment on the 2008 election when Barack Obama was elected in *Uncle Samima Wants U* by starting off with the advertising war between Coke and Pepsi, which prepares us for the parallelism in the way you inter-splice the cuts between Democrats and Republicans on the campaign trail. The film was made long before the Trump v. Clinton campaigns, I should say, because there's a way in which someone on the left in *this* moment in time might look at the film and take issue with your critique of electoral politics; especially the segment near the end of the film where you have the cartoon characters from South Park being chastised by Puff Daddy for not being involved in his "Vote or Die" campaign. Your film is

definitely not coming down on Puff Daddy's side: you're actually lampooning the slogan, whereas South Park is promoting the slogan. But what would you say to someone who would argue that, "You are expressing a form of defeatism which we don't need at this moment, especially with the (2018) interim elections drawing nigh, with the need to get rid of Trump's congress and to get rid of Trump." And it's not just non-black people on the left who would say this. Ten years ago, *Black Agenda Report* refused to publish an article I submitted to them during Obama's first campaign. It was titled, "Why I Don't Vote." The rejection letter said, "This is just not a line we can support." How would you respond to someone who is saying that your film is doing something like that?

**CMC.** I made *Uncle Samima Wants U* in 2008 and I returned to it again in 2012. At that time, I was leaving a performance studies PhD program to enter an African American studies PhD program. I found that certain corners of black studies were especially preoccupied with the prospect of Obama's reelection. Conversations around electoral politics active back in 2008 were resurfacing. I remember so much clamour—especially on social media—insisting that it was vital that black people vote. There was a party line that everyone who was not white, cis-het, Christian, and wealthy should be Democrats. Here I go ruining everybody's fun with this film. I don't think I would care enough to make that kind of statement now as I'm even more divested from those kinds of mystifying representations of the state than I was then. But I'm grateful for the opportunity to reflect upon it and its significance for the trajectory of my thinking and artistic practice.

*Uncle Samima Wants U* was one way of arriving at my current disposition. Alongside audience polls from reality shows like *Dancing With the Stars* or *American Idol*, I use the Coke and Pepsi wars as a thematic thread. I end by presenting water as a forgotten alternative to the soft drinks. This could mean abstention, at minimum, but is open to other interpretations. In other words, we can have different kinds of agitating conversations that don't inevitably climax with us acceding to neoliberal or progressive terms of engagement. Their agendas still mean me harm, so I eschew supporting them any longer. I'm trying to say that I couldn't care less about maintaining decorum, feigning respectability, or cosplaying democratic citizenship. I know that makes me sound like a terrible person to certain individuals. [*laughter*] Oh well.

Many like to say that we disrespect our ancestors with this position, because they supposedly died for the right to vote. I think some were murdered while seeking some semblance of citizenship, avenues for recognition, or reprieves from terror. Our reflections on their aspirations are speculative. And many have basely reduced them to being about casting ballots. How? I think that we all really need to interrogate what we believe we know about what our forebears wanted while also taking inventory of our competing desires to instrumentalize them. We're not fully aware of what our desires are much less being able to assess their ability to be fulfilled.

I've screened the film as part of a performance for both east and west coast audiences. There would always be black people in attendance who would be fuming with me. Certain artists and professors even refused to speak to me from that day forward.

**FW.** It's really interesting that if someone thinks that the film is so insignificant, that it would be significant enough to them to go to the heavy lifting of not speaking to you—that's really something. That says it has a really, really hard effect. One of the things that makes *Uncle Samima Wants U* easier to get on a first screening than *SHADOWPLAY* is the fact that there is a duality that is very pronounced throughout—whether it's the back and forth editing of commercials you splice in there, where one commercial says Coke and the other commercial says Pepsi; or the back and forth editing

of the commercial where two Coke and Pepsi dispensers are warring with each other in an empty hallway, spitting out cans toward each other; and all that is inter-spliced with film footage of news events, of Democrats and Republicans speaking.

What's interesting about both your films is that there is no voiceover narrator, no one to guide the spectator. But there's a conventional guide to *Uncle Samima Wants U* that's easier to get to than *SHADOWPLAY*. In *SHADOWPLAY*, you've got three films from the 1930s: *Morocco*, *Zoujou*, and *Blonde Venus*. You're doing loops, and jump cuts, and collision montage, and associational montage, and intellectual montage. So we've got two Marlene Dietrich films that are being sampled and one Josephine Baker film. Black women in one Marlene Dietrich film, *Blonde Venus*, figure prominently throughout. Then, of course, there is Josephine Baker in her film. None of this is separated or contextualized enough and the speed at which it happens means that its effect is really subliminal. What are you trying to do here?

**CMC.** Thank you for that question. I'm going to backtrack a bit. *SHADOWPLAY* was created as a stand-alone film unlike *Uncle Samima Wants U*, which accompanied an onstage performance. There's no narrator in the latter, because the costuming, make-up, props, lighting, and movement further signal to the audience. The entire look is an aesthetic mashup. It's a red, white, and blue amalgam drawing from burlesque, drag, and minstrelsy. Samima is a portmanteau (Aunt Jemima + Uncle Sam). As a backdrop to the presidential campaign, I used those two figures to trouble the idea of kinship, race, and gender in the national imaginary. I hadn't yet read Hortense Spillers' work when I created these two projects. However, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" immediately resonated with me when I read it years later because ideas around a possessive grammar were already permeating my art.

While the Coke-Pepsi wars sequence projects behind me onstage, I chug from two litre-sized soda bottles. Then I start mixing what remains in each bottle, repeatedly pouring back and forth one into the other. Then I continue drinking the brown mixture until I pantomime vomiting it up into a metal bucket. I'm staging a visceral response to the film's contents, which continue to screen. It's didactic, much like the labour organizer's mandate to "stay on message." Nuance is sacrificed in order to get people to come away with a clear thesis. *Uncle Samima Wants U* was far more agitprop in its approach than *SHADOWPLAY*'s conceptual tenor. I had six and a half minutes to pithily communicate something to the audience. But what gestures, words, materials, sounds, or images are available for someone like me to use?

Along with some of my own camera work, I used a lot of found footage for both films out of necessity. I was a black queer trans person living in poverty. It's what I could afford as I didn't have full access to the lights or camera equipment I needed then. I applied the skills I already had mixing music and ambient sounds to create something else with found footage. By the time I began making *SHADOWPLAY* in 2013, I was ready for a break from displaying my body via performance. It's intended to be a stand-alone experimental short. My introduction to film in academic contexts came via feminist film theory. When approaching *SHADOWPLAY*, I thought about Sergei Eisenstein's montage as a Marxist editing technique alongside D. W. Griffith's investment in narrative editing. Black filmmakers had historically drawn from a variety of traditions, but I was trying to figure out for myself how I could most ethically engage formal strategies whose assumptive logics strained to exhaustively account for antiblack violence. My concerns around desire, violence, and representation could not be accurately conveyed with linear logic. So there are sequences in the film that

intermittently employ different kinds of montage—jolting collisions and others that use consistent rhythm.

In one scene, I contrive an interaction between two characters from separate films by manipulating a continuity editing technique, shot-reverse-shot. I directly cut from a shot of the white male soldier played by Gary Cooper in *Morocco*. The composition centres him in the frame; he is turned toward his right in a three-quarter profile head shot. He stares ahead as he lustfully bites from an apple. I cut from that directly to a full-length shot from *Zoujou* where Josephine Baker slowly pivots. She coquettishly displays her sparkly swimsuit while staring off to her left. Then I cut back to Gary Cooper. The shot-reverse-shot gives the impression that they are in the same room looking at each other. They're actually from two separate cinematic worlds, but I edit them together because I'm arguing that they belong to the same conceptual territory. Even though Baker does not appear in these Dietrich films, she's absolutely ensnared in ways that Dietrich's white femininity is constituted and consumed. Baker figures cinematically as Dietrich's shadowy foil.

**FW.** Very interesting. I think that might be a way to leap to where you are now. You're writing this monograph called *Other | Worldly Possessions: Territory, Slavery + Cosmography in the Early Modern Atlantic World*. I think given what you said, we would be remiss to read this work, which will one day be a groundbreaking book, as a pure cultural history. If I'm hearing you correctly about *SHADOWPLAY*, what you're suggesting is that Marlene Dietrich's capacity to wallow in the machinations of femininity is fuelled by what is happening to Josephine Baker, that these two things are not separated, if I'm hearing you correctly.

**CMC.** Yes.

**FW.** Well here's a question then. How did your practice as a performance artist open up unexpected political implications—not just in your craft as a performance artist and filmmaker, but what I'm really getting to is your ensemble of questions today? In other words, how did you travel (and I think we're on to something with this Marlene Dietrich parasitic femininity bit on Josephine Baker), how did you travel from *SHADOWPLAY* and *Uncle Samima Wants U* and your work as a performance artist to your current writing? One of the things that I was struck with within your overview to the monograph was the way that you speak of blackness as “chimeric negation.” That sentence: “Blackness, as chimeric negation, flourishes as an organizing principle of space—both bodily and geographic,” resonates with what I'm now seeing in *SHADOWPLAY*. But I'd like to hear more, and if you could bring us deeper into your thinking.

**CMC.** I arrived at examining race, gender, sexuality, and empire through the films *Blonde Venus*, *Morocco*, and *Zoujou* by way of one of my earlier performance pieces on the Hottentot Venus. As a black queer nonbinary transmasculine person, I was becoming more aware of the parameters through which I was being consumed onstage and in the larger world. Furthermore, I found that the sexualities and gender expressions of the non-black people around me were inextricably tethered to mine, like a spider-web. At that time, I still prioritized trying to be in conversation with cisgender/non-trans black feminist artists and intellectuals around hypersexualization of black personhood.

There is an unspoken expectation that I as a performer with this embodiment operate with a self-effacing spirit of generosity toward the audience. But I hated the audience by the end of it. *[laughter]* The hostility I experienced at the hands of the audience, producers, performers, academics, and

fundamentals over a five-year period became exasperating. I determined that channelling my interests away from performing into scholarly work was a more sustainable option. So I pursued a PhD rather than an MFA. In the last piece I performed publicly called “Mammy Dearest,” I eat a white baby drenched in Aunt Jemima syrup. The more honestly I communicated how alienated I felt from the world in my work, the more antisocial it became. It was a horrific fantasy turned spectacle, which was one way to respond to the steadfast reminders that black sovereign subjectivity was a gendered impossibility that upheld the plantation family romance.

This wasn’t purely a historicist exercise in accurately documenting past events. It emerges creatively out of my day-to-day experience as the black queer nonbinary transmasculine person. My capacity to claim the territorial integrity of my body-space was structurally impaired to near foreclosure. A flashpoint for trans suffering is negotiating infringements on our capacity for bodily autonomy. How does chattel slavery inflect the grammars through which that suffering is expressed?

Territorialization became a preoccupation and ultimately the theoretical core of my writing when I began to seriously contend with territory not simply as nonbodily, extracorporeal geographic space. Territory encompasses space, lifeforms, knowledge, and culture. By tracing how blackness figures in early modern scientific discourse, *Other | Worldly Possessions* examines how territorialization in the Atlantic World during the Age of Discovery occasions black dispossession. The violation and capture of enslaved black bodies not only fuels how air-land-sea area is invaded and seized, but also how fields of knowledge are apportioned and secured. What are the affective registers through which humans are emplotted into space and place? How is blackness disavowed in the ways that non-black people understand and map the world? How does antiblackness shape how black people inhabit Atlantic World territory and debilitate their claims to it and pursuits of possessive individualism? These questions extend back to my performance work, where instead of investigating only the overdetermined condition of black femininity or black masculinity as discrete phenomena, I also meditate on the sex-gender binary as a racialized axis of Atlantic World territorialization.

**FW.** What you were just saying about the way you are being consumed on stage—you don’t actually talk about that directly. But I think that if you think about a queer trans person and Wanda Sabir, in the film, as a cisgender heterosexual person, you’re both being consumed as academics also. If I’m to read here between the lines of your “Overview” to the critical writing, what you’re saying is that in the audience of academia—which is of course shot through a prism because they’re not all in one room like an auditorium—there’s a certain kind of aggressivity and violence that a black trans person experiences—and in your situation, because you’re bringing black studies into a place in which traditional scholars say it doesn’t belong, there’s two whammies against you there, if I’m correct. Maybe you could tell me more about that.

**CMC.** Dominion over spheres of knowledge is expression of sovereignty and then some. Territorialization isn’t only achieved by occupying landscapes, but also entails the racialized delimiting of epistemological arenas (Wynter 2006; Judy 1993). Another scandalizing aspect of my experience is the vitriol directed toward me because of my racialized gender expression, sexuality, class background, birthplace, and political investments. I’m extra. In academic contexts, I’m disproportionately targeted because of that excess while simultaneously being overlooked. Sabotage, isolation, gaslighting, surveillance, harassment, punishment, and even assault are all things I’ve encountered. The perpetrators vary. Many would prefer to wield me as a mascot that does not speak for itself. I’m prized most as a vector through which others can accomplish themselves. The antiblackness of it makes the violations more egregious than the words “illegibility” or

“tokenization” can convey. The interdisciplinary terrain of gender & sexuality studies especially authorizes queer non-trans scholars and cis-het women to deploy bodies like mine in ways that persistently prioritize their suffering at our expense while simultaneously working to sanitize black trans people out from the field’s salaried personnel. We function more readily as rhetorical objects through which they craft self-serving arguments than their interlocutors. This stifling dynamic is among the chief reasons why I shifted from doing a practice-as-research dissertation to a theoretical/archive-based dissertation. Bound up with the phobic responses to my embodied comportment, my competence and claims to authorship are relentlessly attacked. The disruption some think I present is exacerbated by the atypical objects and vantages that animate my writing. I do not believe that black studies should be reduced to exposé, uplift, or statistics. We should think more capaciously about its potential.

**FW.** Yes, yes. Let’s go more into your writing. I see this as a major book. There’s a lot at stake in this project, you’re showing that thought itself—the capacity to imagine meta-categories like possession, verticality, chaos, and matter—is predicated on an imaginative labour and the raw material of this imaginative labour is black flesh. In other words asking: why is the European capacity to imagine the witch hunts predicated not on white women—even if they’re being burned at the stakes—but on blackness as property that enables such rituals of demonization? Once you start saying that the persecution of white women as witches is predicated on the imaginative labour of antiblackness, it compels us to rethink the assumptive logic of late modernist humanist discourse.

**CMC.** By foregrounding blackness’s role in early modern witch hunts and trials, I am able to show how antiblackness dually inflects possession as a territorializing expression of 1) property rights and 2) spiritual infestation. This allows me to show how demonological obsession with exorcising blackness’ supernatural infiltration is inextricable from chattel slavery’s transmogrification of black flesh into property.

Antiblackness is unthought in the attendant scholarship. Blackness circulates discursively, but is cordoned off from discussion of racial slavery’s interface with the occult sciences. That conceptual sequestering fascinates me. I’m intrigued by demonology and alchemy where antiblackness operates even in the seeming absence of actual black persons. Matter putrefies during *nigredo*, alchemy’s “blackening process,” and purifies during *albedo*, its “whitening process,” so that it can undergo gendered transformations into more perfect forms like gold. I’m not saying there’s an isomorphic relationship between what’s happening with blackness then and now, but resonances abound in how it’s been weaponized toward the purpose of conquering, modifying, and managing territorial procurements across time. Alchemical tradition, spanning the eleventh to seventeenth centuries, is no exception. Its chromatic, chemical, and symbolic distinctions influence contemporary schools of thought like posthumanism or new materialism, for example.

**FW.** You use the word “fuels,” and that’s a really interesting verb to think about how antiblackness *fuels* the capacity to think chaos, to think matter, to think verticality. “Possession” is a key word in your work but you have complicated this paradox with another paradox, which is to say that in addition to the concept of possession—which brings to mind the accumulation of fungible items, commodities, territorialization, as well—all this stuff becomes legible through possession of a black body, a body that cannot possess itself. How can we come full circle, through these concepts, to the work that you’ve done as an artist?



**CMC.** The idea that African-derived people's blackness made them more susceptible to being demonically infested or possessed or having the territorial integrity of their bodies occupied by another isn't unrelated to being possessed by the property relations of a white enslaver at the time. The idea that black people were vulnerable in this way means that wherever they go, they're mobile and motile landmarks. They index and trouble sovereign claims they can never possess. The vicarious claims made through us can cover an array of things.

**FW.** I want to loop this back again to your work as an artist. You said earlier that a lot of the ways in which you're theorizing sexuality, methodology, and antiblackness today were not fully developed back in the day when you made these films and were doing certain performances with them. One of the things I see—and this is in my own work also—even though politically *Uncle Samima Wants U* is at the level of a preconscious narrative, it is imbued with questions that neither you or I are really concerned with anymore. There's a way in which the cinematic strategies are resonant with this impossibility of Blackness to cohere as a body at any scale—that you're writing about today. I see that operating in the ways in which, especially *SHADOWPLAY*, refuses to let us be stabilized by a narrative arc. The rapidity of the montage, the ways in which—when Gary Cooper does say something, we have to strain to hear it as though we're not an auditor.

I think that what I'm trying to say is—let me make it anecdotal: Steve McQueen, the black artist and filmmaker, made a film, *Hunger*, about the IRA prison strikes. For the first very long opening sequences of the movie, there's no dialogue. There's just the acoustics of captivity and the visuals of captivity. For a long time throughout the film, there's no continuity in the way in which the narrative works normally in another film along the same situations, which is called *Some Mother's Son*. The way the continuity works with the latter film is explained to the audience: who's suffering, why are they suffering, and what's at stake for Irish redemption.

None of that is happening in the first part of Steve McQueen's film. There's an absence of coherence. And I think this has a lot to do with the fact that we've got a black person making a film, even though the film is, putatively, about some white people. You see what I am saying in terms of his grammar of suffering? It has infused itself into this film, which is why some people from Northern Ireland that I spoke to really hated that film. [laughter] I see that intuition working in the film *SHADOWPLAY*'s comfort with the absence of a narrative spine that hooks us in, because ultimately, what you're going to say years later in 2018 is that other people's narrative spine comes from their parasitic relationship to Blackness. Do you agree with that or did I miss the boat somewhere?

**CMC.** That makes sense. It's not possible for someone like me to intelligibly emplot myself within the narrative space of a film or even modernity at large. So why try? Blackness is maligned as a disaggregating force. Rather than masochistically trying to domesticate back through the Pillars of Hercules and the vestibule into the house of culture, why not let it spiral throughout me to limn something else? This methodological impulse de-prioritizes resolution or prescription. I think alienation is an incendiary position to think from rather than flee. Black people—we are estranged from imaginations that nonetheless need us. This is a world-making and world-breaking conundrum. However, I don't think that only needs to be our problem. It's everybody's problem.

**FW.** Exactly. I think that's a beautiful—well not beautiful [laughter]—but a good place to end it for now.

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Frank Wilderson and Cecilio M. Cooper have had final editorial control of the script of these interviews.

## Note

1. Frank Wilderson's *Reparations . . . Now* is described in 2008 as a work in progress: a documentary with an audio track consisting of black people reflecting on issues associated with the dilemma of slavery and its ramifications in the twenty-first century—ranging from the sublime and banal to the vitriolic and bloody. The film's images are selected and combined in a pastiche of emotional and intellectual montage so as to compel the viewer to contemplate the terror of everyday black life and the impossibility of “repairing” a slave. Interviews with politicians, scholars, artists, and workaday and homeless black folks are cross-cut with still photography and swaths of the director's monologue about the psychic and political wounds of a middle-class black family that descended from the White Castle Plantation in Louisiana (now a “historic site” / combination bed-and-breakfast resort). The film deliberates, without resolution, on unnamable loss. <http://www.incognegro.org/reparations.html>.

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