Social Housing Alliance
Conditions of Struggle Reading Discussion class series
Class 1 part 2
February 2015

Anti-Black Racism & Social Movements:
From Ferguson to Vancouver

*Class participants are expected only to come to the discussion class having thought about the subject. The reading package is put together to frame and support our discussion but participants are not required to do all the readings to be welcome in the class. Contact class organizers at socialhousinbc@gmail.com for more info.
Conditions of Struggle reading discussion questions

American racism can appear as a specifically national problem. Racism, as philosopher Charles W. Mills says, is the historic foundation and currency of social relations in the USA, and white supremacy is its structure. Through these readings and materials, we would like to consider three questions:

1) Does (anti-black) racism have a specific home? Is it local? Global? More? What are the implications of this local/global question for an analysis of white supremacy and for the fight against it?

2) What does this mean in a Canadian (and specifically Vancouver) context? American racism is structured between the "binaries" of white and Black racialization, with white power wielding the power of defining the race hierarchy. In the way race is structured in Western Canada, Black people and communities are less visible, disappeared from history and denied in present-day society. Does whiteness in Vancouver exist without Blackness? Consider especially the “2014-15 U.S. Black uprising” articles and the multiple meanings of support for Black struggle in the U.S. by whites in Vancouver. Think about the uncomfortable possibility that distant support for Black struggle in the U.S. might also position white (and non-Black people of colour) Vancouverites as “better” than U.S. whites regarding anti-Black racism.

3) Kristin Braswell writes, “Since the moment Michael Brown was murdered on August 9, women in Ferguson have played a critical role in mobilizing their communities to convict officer Darren Wilson.” And yet, the media covering Ferguson and resistance in other cities seems to focus primarily on leadership by Black men. Related to this, a disturbing and factual refrain has emerged in popular media that every 28 hours, an unarmed Black man is shot in the U.S. However, no numbers are offered or seem to be recorded for Black women, or Black trans women. For the mainstream (coded white) U.S. media and consciousness, Black men are variously portrayed as victims, criminals, and sometimes feared militant leaders. Why do Black men seem to be hyper-visible in both life and death? Are we aware of the roles of Black women in movements and in struggle? And what does white supremacy got to do with it?

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This is a transcription 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 IMIXWHATLIKE 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://imixwhatlike.org/2014/10/01/frankwildersonandantiblackness-2/

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“We’re trying to destroy the world”
Anti-Blackness & Police Violence After Ferguson
An Interview with Frank B. Wilderson, III
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
“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.”

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 re-formulate the problem and begin to take a much more iconoclastic response to it.

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

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?
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
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 discrimina-
tion, 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 gener-
al. 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 peo-
ple 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 im-
portant. 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 ac-
tivist 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 think-
ing 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.

[...]

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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—and 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. [...]
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


“[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.”
4. Campaign Life (now called Campaign Life Coalition) was created in 1978 as a lobbying organization formed by anti-abortion groups from across Canada. In 1997 it launched LifeSiteNews, an internet news service whose primary audience is social conservatives and anti-abortion movements in the United States and Canada. One of Campaign Life’s founding members, Glen Landolt, is currently also the vice-president and public face of REAL (Realistic, Equal, Active, for Life) Women of Canada. Created in 1983 as an explicitly anti-feminist women’s organization, REAL Women formed to counter the growth and success of the feminist National Action Committee on the Status of Women. REAL Women is the most widely recognized women’s anti-abortion lobby in Canada. As with Campaign Life Coalition, its anti-liberal and socially conservative position is used to lobby against equity and the expansion of rights-based laws, including those pertaining to pornography, affirmative action, universal childcare, prostitution and same-sex marriage.

Afterword

UNMAPPING CANADA
Starting with Bodies and Repressed Truths

Sherene Razack

At the end of all our theorizing, there is someone’s body, so I start there. — Mari Matsuda 2010

The scholars in this collection confidently launch their contributions to what they describe as a critical Canadian studies approach. They set about contesting the liberal roots of multiculturalism, unmapping Canada as a White settler society and subjecting nationalism to full critical scrutiny. The word critical, they avow, is meant to underline that studies of the nation must begin with the understanding that Canada is a White settler society, one that is constituted in ongoing colonial violence.

This book invites readers to think about the salience of race and colonialism in the Canadian context. Racial exclusion is built into the Canadian story of multiculturalism, Haque argues, showing that multiculturalism emerged as a compromise between two colonizing nations that were negotiating their respective powers, powers that cohere around the management of Indigenous and racialized others. Although each colonizing group imagines itself as White, whiteness is differently constituted. Leroux traces how Quebec crafts its own version of a White settler society based on its history as coloniser (of Indigenous peoples) and colonized (by the English). Cleaving to the idea of being colonized, Quebeckers readily acquire in the subordination of racial others in a bid to protect what they view as their own endangered patrimony.

What the national mythology declares to be true, that Canada is a society founded by Europeans, must be made true on the ground. White mythologies are underwritten by material practices such as arts funding. As Patona shows, arts funding prioritizes European elite arts. Indeed, a thousand commemorative acts teach citizens that we live in a society peacefully settled by Europeans and without a long history of the dispossession of Indigenous peoples and the exploitation of racialized groups. A museum made of the tunnels of Moose Jaw, where Chinese workers are supposed to have lived after working on the railroad, tells a story of a benevolent White Canada transcending its racist past (Leung’s chapter). The Saskatchewan Centennial commemorates the initiatives of pioneers and disavows Indigenous nations (Caldwell’s chapter). In these pedagogical enterprises, no stone is left unturned. Monuments commemorating White feminists (Nadeau’s chapter), the iconic status of Indian moccasins (Lee’s chapter) and the Rainbow Bridge at Niagara Falls connecting Canada to the U.S (Schlev’s chapter) all must be enlisted in the symbolic.

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and material production of a White Canada and a benevolent nation. Anyone hoping to enter the national story must tell a story of White enterprise and innocence. Some Jews, Byars and Schwartz argue, turn to Zionism to negotiate their own passage into the nation as people of European origin. Sexual minorities, Howlett suggests, mimic a White heteronormativity to gain the right to marriage. If we are inducted into the national mythology at every turn, it is surely because the colonial project is unstable. First Nations who assert their sovereignty through the right to move between the two countries that the Rainbow Bridge separates, for instance, remind us all who stand on ground we really stand on and what it takes to make it ours.

What are the challenges facing critical scholars in a White settler society? Unlike the recent turn (and of course return) in the academy to a scholarship that refuses to start from a commitment to social justice, the contributors to this book are absolutely clear that scholarship must be at the outset anti-racist and anti-colonial. I am inspired by the unabashed politics of the scholars in this anthology. I would like to use the space of this afterword to consider some directions for critical scholars in mapping the contours of a White settler society. I believe that critical scholars must start with bodies, as Mari Matsuda maintains. For Matsuda, starting with bodies is about pursuing an “understanding of those places where race meets power, where people are hurt, where people survive, where people thrive” (Matsuda 2010: 350). I would like to begin with the Indigenous body and end with a consideration of where other bodies are on the landscape.

STARTING WITH INDIGENOUS BODIES

If, as Mari Matsuda states, there is a body at the end of our theorizing, a violated, marginalized and sometimes murdered person, then at the beginning of our theorizing is the body of the colonizer, rapist or murderer. For me, a pre-eminent challenge is to make colonizers visible and to explain why they do what they do in order that they are held to account, both at the individual and collective levels. The theoretical scaffold on which accountability is built may draw on a variety of disciplines, but its point of departure, if the context is Canada, is that this is a White settler society where the theft of Indigenous land is an ongoing project that requires a vigorous White supremacy at its core. In scholarship and in law (where accountability is pursued), the challenge for me is to understand the violence of the colonial project and the colonial subjects it both requires and produces.

Some scholars have turned to psychoanalysis for answers to the problem of violence against the Indigenous in settler colonial societies, for example, Brunner’s work on Zionism as a form of settler colony description that is deeply narcissistic and therefore fearful of and violent towards Palestinians (Brunner 2010). Nationalisms that are described as narcissistic, as Brunner describes Israeli nationalism (and arguably all nationalisms are to some degree narcissistic), are organized around protecting the material basis of normative citizens. It is therefore necessary to theorize the role that race plays in the making of the nation’s psyche, constituting some citizens as within the national community and others as threats to it. Psychoanalysis offers insight into the persistence of violence against racial others in White settler societies. As Renée Bergland (2000) explains, drawing on Etienne Balibar, the settler subject internalizes the colonial relation, believing that it is through enterprise, moral superiority and courage that the land belongs to White settlers, while at the same time these same settlers remain haunted by those they have dispossessed. The American subject is obsessed with Indians, Bergland writes, often imagining that Indians are ghosts and not living subjects, because it is only through Indians that the settler subject feels both entitlement and anxiety. Both “Aliens [Black slaves and later other groups exploited for labour] and Indians are repressed because they represent the fearsome possibility of non-citizenship” (18). The connection among individual settler identity, violence against Indigenous people and the settler collective is established and is traceable through law. This connection becomes visible when we begin to account for the persistent violence against Indigenous people and the widespread indifference to it. The nexus of violence, terror and subjectivity, as Saidye Hartman (1997) writes with respect to slavery and as I attempt to trace with respect to Indigenous peoples, can be examined in moments of shocking and terrible violence as well as in moments of routinized violence. The challenge is to see how terror is enacted in the everyday.

In my research on Indigenous deaths in custody, I am quite literally staring with bodies: dead Indigenous men and some women whose bodies are found in the snow with handcuff marks on the wrists, in custody in hospital with boot prints on the chest and in dark city alleys. For example, focusing on inquests and public inquiries, I track what is said in law about a sixty-seven-year-old Shuswap man who died in hospital in police custody with a large, visible, purple boot print on his chest, a mark no one notices (Razack 2011a, 2011b). Both the boot print and the indifference to it require explanation. In another death in custody case, I analyze what is said in the commission of inquiry into the actions of the police, who dropped off a barely conscious alcoholic older Indigenous man in a dark alley on a cold Vancouver night (Razack forthcoming). These deaths, and others, give rise to patterns involving an everyday failure to care, a systemic indifference and callousness, and sometimes, outright murder. Inquests and public inquiries reveal these patterns and offer the same recommendations time after time. We ought to care more, they conclude, offering a plethora of recommendations that have little impact. Such legal accounts of Indigenous death do something. I advance the argument that the inquest and the inquiry are sites which produce the settler subject, whose entitlement to the land is secured through a performance of Indigenous people as a dying race whom no one can kill or harm since they are dying anyway. It is only when I bring together the violence itself and the persistent indifference to it in law that I see that White settler society has a strong vested interest in violence against Indigenous peoples. The violence provides settlers with a sense of themselves as modern and capable, and as legitimate owners of the land. Race and land come together in these moments of violence and in law’s treatment of it.

Writing about a public inquiry into the death of Neil Stonechild, a seventeen-year-old Indigenous youth whose frozen body was found on the outskirts of Saskatoon, Joyce Green (2006) examines Stonechild’s death and the related terrible fact of three frozen Indigenous bodies turning up in the same area, around the same time that Stonechild was found. She offers the argument that racism killed Neil Stonechild. Recalling that two police officers had a bloody and battered Stonechild in their cruiser hours before he died and reviewing the evidence at the inquiry that Stonechild had handcuff marks on his wrists and scrapes on his face consistent with handcuffs being slammed into it, Green considers what could
have led police to engage in the practice of dumping Indigenous men to freeze to death. Drawing on Albert Memmi's theorizing of the oppressor's hatred for the colonized, a hatred Memmi maintained was born in the oppressor's theft of land, Green suggests that it is this hate, nurtured in a structural privilege and systemic racism, that explains why the two officers, Larry Hartwig and Brad Senger, may have driven Neil Stonechild to his death. Power and hatred came together that night, she suggests, to produce the outcome of two cops brutalizing a young boy and leaving him to die in subzero temperatures in a field outside of town. The same power and malice come together to prompt other police officers to protect Hartwig and Senger, and for the system to delay a thorough investigation of his death until ten years later; when similar deaths finally prompted an RCMP investigation and ultimately a public inquiry. Although Hartwig and Senger were ultimately fired for lying about the fact that they had Stonechild in their custody a few hours before he died, they were not charged with manslaughter or murder.

The first challenge that arises when Indigenous bodies with handcuff marks on the wrists turn up in the snow is to prove the connection between the two officers and Stonechild's death. The second challenge is to show that Hartwig and Senger are not simply rogue police officers but White men who share in a widespread dehumanization of Indigenous peoples. Critical scholars have little to contribute on the first point since this is a matter best left to detectives, pathologists and forensic experts, among others. Our domain is the second challenge. We track dehumanization, and we are tasked, so to speak (to use police and military language) with showing how little anyone White cared or considered Indigenous life to be valuable. If a widespread dehumanization is in evidence, then we can begin to see how bodies may have ended up in snowy fields and why so few cared about how they met their fate. Green begins the argument that racism kills by bridging the gap between the individual and the systemic. Citing my own work on the murder of Pamela George, an Indigenous woman killed by two White men in Regina, she proposes that we consider that Neil Stonechild was exiled from the city because the city is established historically and in the present as belonging to White settlers (see Razack 2000). In their individual acts, two White police officers were simply doing the work required of them in a White settler society, the work of cleansing the city of Indigenous bodies.

As I argue in my study of Indigenous deaths in custody and in my exploration of the death of Pamela George, colonizers lay claim to the land through the practice of violating with impunity those whom they have dispossessed. Racial entitlement, fueled by a devaluing of the lives of the colonized, must be continually performed if colonizers are to know themselves as owners and if they are to actually become owners. Violence towards the colonized confirms who is in charge, as nothing else can, but it also dispenses with bodies who can contest the settler claim to land. Thus, a making of self through violence against the Indigenous other characterizes White settler society. Such a self is in evidence when two ordinary White college students kill an Indigenous woman in a drunken spree, when police drop Indigenous people on the outskirts of prairie cities on cold winter nights and when any of us who considers frozen Indigenous bodies in the snow and wrists with handcuff marks, fail to ask ourselves how they came to be there. If there remains, however, something under-theorized in this argument, a gap that persists between the individual and the systemic, something that would explain the murderous impulses one sees in the high rates of Indigenous deaths in custody and the hundreds of missing and murdered Indigenous women but also in societal indifference to these bodies, it is because the racial subject does easy tracking as a subject who is full of rage. Rage has many manifestations and the psyche is hard to track empirically.

What To Do with Larry Hartwig's Smile?
What to do, for example, when those who commit racial violence are the loudest voices proclaiming their love and respect for Indigenous peoples? Consider Larry Hartwig as a prototype in this regard. Filmmaker Tasha Hubbard talked about her encounter with Larry Hartwig while making a film about freezing deaths early in 2000. In Hubbard's film, Two Worlds Colliding, there are two vignettes of Hartwig. In the first, in an on-camera interview well before Hartwig's appearance at the inquiry into the death of Neil Stonechild, Hartwig, one of the new [White] cultural liaison officers, describes his healthy respect for Indigenous communities and his conviction that it is he who must learn from them. "We must never abuse our authority," he tells Hubbard emphatically. "We have the authority to destroy lives and we must always be careful that that authority is never ever abused" (Hubbard 2004). One's hair stands on end when next we see Hartwig testifying at the inquiry into the freezing death of Neil Stonechild. We learn that Hartwig was one of the officers who had Neil Stonechild in custody that night.

When I asked Hubbard about this horrifying moment in her film, she elaborated on how she came to shoot the two vignettes:

When I met him for the first time, I was attending a diversity conference where 20+ Saskatoon police officers were in attendance. I knew some of them, and was asking them for short interviews. One refused, saying he did not want to go on camera, but suggested I ask Hartwig for an interview. I was told that he likes to talk, and indeed, he readily agreed to be interviewed. The first words out of his mouth were "we as a police force have developed a culture of secrecy." I actually committed a director's gaffe by turning to my camera operator and asking him if the camera was on. Most police were reluctant to talk about abuse of power, and it would often take me many questions before they would begin to talk about the issues on the table. But not Hartwig. At the end of the interview, as he walked back into the conference, my crew and I commended on the anomalous nature of his interview. It wasn't until six months later that it became public that he was one of the officers being investigated for Neil Stonechild's death. I now wonder if that reluctant officer pushed me in Hartwig's direction because it was known within the force that he was a suspect.

When it was Hartwig's turn to testify at the Commission of Inquiry, we filmed his entire testimony. Something told me to make sure we filmed him as he exited the stand. His smiling face as he gets further away from the stand disturbs me greatly. Smugly celebrating his avoidance of responsibility? I turn avoided watching Hartwig's footage for weeks. When I finally brought myself to watch, I read the transcripts alongside. A few times, I knew there was nothing
useable in specific sections of testimony, so would fast forward and it was then
I made the following observation: at regular intervals, Hartwig turned his head
from right to left. Both his interview and his testimony in the inquiry began to
remind me of a performance. It is as though officers like Hartwig and Munsen
(the senior officer responsible for Darrell Night’s abandonment) “perform” their
role as trustworthy police officers while masking their true intentions and actions
towards Indigenous peoples, choosing to replicate the power dynamic with tragic
results. (Hubbard and Razack 2011: 321)

Hubbard’s insights about what police officers perform in legal settings suggest that
Hartwig exhibits aspects of a psychopathology. It is Hartwig’s “growing smile” that we
need to explore here. Does the smile indicate that Hartwig is gleeful that he got away with
murder? Is he smiling because he believes that the system will protect him? Colonialism
produces someone like Hartwig. We can see the connection between Hartwig and the
White collective during the inquiry when it became clear that for so many police officers
and administrators, Stonechild’s death was not something to be concerned about. Hartwig
(and Senger) were clearly part of a wider police collective for whom Indigenous life held
little value. Hartwig’s performance was matched by several police officers who testified
at the inquiry.

From his commissioner’s seat, Mr. Justice David Wright had to watch a seemingly
endless parade of police witnesses, from investigators to the chair of command, whose
conduct the commissioner could only conclude was inexcusable. From the investigator
who closed the Stonechild file in a matter of hours, to the deputy police chief who misled
the press about how little respect had been extended to find Stonechild’s killers, few police
officers behaved with respect to Neil Stonechild. Some lied; others could not
remember; and all but two (tellingly, an Indigenous officer and a White officer who had
an adopted Indigenous son who knew Neil Stonechild) could not find it in their hearts
to pursue the story of what happened to Neil Stonechild.

In the Stonechild Inquiry, confronted with what appeared inexcusably as a collective
impulse to dehumanize, Mr. Justice Wright refused to begin with colonialism, which would
bring the White collective into view. Instead, the judge finds that Indigenous people and
the police are equally to blame for what came to pass on the frozen prairie that night,
and in the subsequent widespread failure to care. Here, as Green points out, Wright is
walking a path that depends on accepting that colonizer and colonized are somehow
equivalent. Presumably, Indigenous people are to blame because some are alcoholics who
are difficult to handle; the police are to blame because they do not have effective ways
(and presumably non-legal ones) of handling the problem that Indigenousness poses, namely
public drunkenness and widespread addiction. Things would all work better if everyone
understood each other culturally the judge concluded. Armed with cultural knowledge,
perhaps non-Indigenous cops would not indulge so quickly in devaluing Indigenous life.

Unable to entirely ignore the pathology of what unfolded before him, the commissioner
recommends race relations and anger management training and strategies to promote
better cross-cultural relations. As Green (2006: 520) observes: “Wright misunderstood
the toxic gulf [between Indigenous people and police] because he saw it as personal
and relational, and as being equally the responsibility of the dominant and Indigenous
communities. He did not conceptualize it as a logical consequence of the processes of
colonialism.” The only way to avoid taking the wrong turn that Mr. Justice Wright takes,
Green concludes, is to understand where a political culture comes from. As she
reassuringly acknowledges, however, how can we expect this understanding from those who
benefit most from the arrangements?

If we can track a persistent dehumanization, the “toxic gulf” of which Green speaks,
we must connect it to the materialities of the colonial project and not only to the psyche.
The rage/anxiety that prompts the dehumanization comes from some place and that place
is the material structure in which White colonizers are at the top of the racial hierarchy
and Indigenous peoples are at the bottom. As settlers, who must we be and who do we
become when our individual and collective selves depend on a storyline about innocent
besieged settlers and Indigenous peoples who are unable to bear the stresses of modern
life? If we don’t begin with the fact of colonialism, we will end up where Mr. Justice
Wright did, turning a murder and collective complicity in it into a misunderstanding
between two cultures.

Leslie Thidilen-Wilson (2012) offers just such an anti-colonial analysis in her remarkable
exploration of the Canadian government’s and the law’s responses to Indigenous demands
for redress for the genocidal violence of Indian residential schools (IRS). Thidilen-Wilson
argues that we must first understand the institutions of the schools and the justice system
as integral to the colonial quest to control land and resources. As Indigenous scholars
emphasize repeatedly, the violence of IRS was aimed at nothing less than eradicating a
culture and a people. Once we appreciate that residential schools were central to the acqui-
ssion of land and resources, we can begin to see how Canada’s response to Indigenous
calls for IRS redress is also part of a continuing acquisition. The government’s and the
law’s responses to Indigenous demands re-assert colonial sovereignty today not only by
disavowing colonization altogether but by casting Indigenous peoples as too damaged to
become modern subjects, and thus not fit to be present owners of the land. Arguing that
the ongoing colonial project is secured when courts refuse to recognize the violence of Indian
residential schools, Thidilen-Wilson demonstrates what she terms the triadic relationship
of land, terror and White identity that structures settler colonialism. Building on Fanon,
who made clear that colonialism is not only a project of accumulation, but crucially a quest
for identity, Thiden-Wilson demonstrates that “white racial identity and hegemony are
constructed and solidified through relations of ‘accumulation’” (8). Put more directly, “just
as settler control of land is always about white identity, so too, white identity is always
about land (even when land is not explicitly visible or tangible)” (8).

The inextricable link between White identity and land is, I propose, a critical part of
the methodological foundation of critical scholarship. The dehumanization of Indigenous
people, Fanon showed, synthetically and materially produces the settler as entitled to the
land. If we start here, we can follow, as Thiden-Wilson does, how Whites as a collective
are secured whenever violence is directed against Indigenous people, and whenever that
violence is denied. We cannot explore the Larry Hartwigs of the world, and indeed Mr.
Justice Wright or ourselves, unless we consider both the psyche and its material base.
When we ask what would prompt two White police officers to batter an Indigenous man
and leave him to die, and what would enable so many to disregard such a death or to view it as inevitable in view of Indigenous dysfunction, these questions must be explored within the context of a history and ongoing theft of land, and within a context of ongoing structures and institutions that perpetuate the supremacy of one group over another. These questions cannot be pursued if we continue to believe that our encounters with each other are merely encounters between individuals, and that we are born again each day, fresh and innocent, outside of history. They cannot be pursued if we refuse to acknowledge where we are and who we become. What would interrupt the cycle of violence that begins with the theft of the land and continues with the persistent dehumanization of Indigenous peoples? Our answer to this question cannot be limited to the recommendation that settlers should better understand Indigenous people culturally. We will need to stop stealing and to give back some of what was stolen. The fact of the matter is that the bodies continue to pile up.

OTHER RACIALIZED BODIES

If we must start with Indigenous bodies, understanding that the settler state is profoundly structured by the theft of Indigenous lands and the ever constant necessity of ensuring that Indigenous people must always be disappearing, as Andrea Smith has succintly put it, the White settler state is also structured by other imperatives: the commodification of the Black body as property (slavery) and the exploitation of the labour of marginalized groups. Unless we believe that White supremacy structures all racialized bodies in the same way, the critical scholar must consider the meaning of differently racialized bodies, unpacking the violence that is directed at each and considering how these are related to each other in the project of making a White settler society. As Bergland reminds us, all disenfranchised groups must be spectral, denied personhood yet returning in uncanny moments to remind the settlers that they are not the enterprising and innocent subject of their fantasies (Bergland 2000: 18). The challenge for critical scholars is to understand the relationship between these spectral subjects in the White settler unconscious.

Canadian critical scholars, myself included, have been particularly challenged to theorize the violence directed at Black bodies. Because Canada did not have plantation slavery (or any other formal), we easily elide slavery in our analyses, believing that transatlantic slavery did not leave its mark on Black bodies in Canada as it did in the United States. In effect, many of us fail to see the continuous eviction from human that is the lot of Black people regardless of whether they are the descendents of slaves or recent immigrants from countries in Africa and/or the Caribbean.

Jared Sexton has carefully explained what it means to theorize blackness, or more specifically, anti-blackness, the obsessive need of North American White settler society to commodify and obliterate Black bodies. We must begin, as Sexton advises, (drawing on Hartman 1997) with the absoluteness of power that converged on the Black slave’s body. The Black slave was property and the slave’s life had value only in relation to this fact. The commodification of human existence that was so unprecedented until the transatlantic slave trade means that the Black slave lost his land or even his community but in fact his very existence as human. It is this “crushing objecthood,” of which Fanon writes, that continues to define Black bodies today, and it is this singular condition that we lose when we engage in facile comparisons of forms of violence. For example, to compare the torture at Abu Ghraib to the lynching of Blacks after slavery, as I did in my own work (Razack 2008), is to elide the specific history and meaning of the Black body, and the specific violence of anti-blackness (Sexton 2010: 43). We must attend to the singularity of racial slavery and its legacy of dehumanization of the Black body (44). In comparison to other racialized groups, “anti-blackness seems invariant and limitless” (44). Sexton is careful to note, however, that it is not comparison that matters, as much as a relational analysis: “Black existence does not represent the total reality of the racial formation — it is not the beginning and the end of the story — but it does relate to the totality; it indicates the (repressed) truth of the political and economic system” (48). The truth of Black labour must be denied if the structure of White settler society is to stand, an argument made by Achille Mbembe with respect to apartheid South Africa. Mbembe writes of the racial city and its economy. Under apartheid, where Black people did all the work, the use value of Black labour had to be obfuscated and repressed, and the Black body rendered both indispensable and expendable (Mbembe 2003: 301).

An urgent question confronting critical theorists is what happens if we fail to attend to Black existence in our theorizing. What happens to my own theorizing of Indigenous deaths in custody? For Sexton, Blacks are “the prototypical targets of the panoply of police practices and the juridical infrastructure built up around them” (48). If, then, I do not take into account what happens to Blacks, I will miss something about how policing and the justice system are both organized. However, Sexton’s observations about Blacks as prototypical targets does not hold true for Canada. The contemporary parameters of policing emerged most clearly with respect to the policing of Indigenous bodies in the late nineteenth century (Edmonds 2010). Vagrancy laws, for instance, emerged in the context of settlers claiming the city as White space at a time when it was urgent for White settlers to evict Indigenous people from cities and confine them to reserves. But Sexton is correct in one respect. When we consider why jails and prisons are filling up with Indigenous peoples, we would do well to look to the policing of Blacks in the U.S. to understand some of the contemporary practices that have gained currency in Canada. The school-to-prison pipeline, for instance, while differently organized for Indigenous peoples (one need only think of the history of residential schools), now draws on schooling practices that developed in the United States, where the schooling, or more accurately non-schooling, of Blacks occurs in a context where the Black body is criminalized from the start. The apparatus of schooling and even teaching practices revolved around the need to control Black bodies always understood as threat. I might also ask in turn what Sexton misses when he “forgets” colonialism. Andrea Smith (2010) comments that when Sexton relegates all non-Black racialized groups to a single category, lumping Indigenous people into the category of racial minority immigrants, this simply reifies the settler colonial project. Land claims disappear, as does genocide, into the fiction that Indigenous people have simply progressed into (been assimilated into) the White settler population. To believe in this fiction not only flies in the face of the facts but, more importantly, misses the ongoing and active efforts on the part of the settler state to destroy Indigenous communities.

If the commodification of human existence that structures responses to Black bodies
is the repressed truth of White settler society, another (and prior) repressed truth structures White settler society: the land is stolen. Each repressed truth gives rise to particular violence, but these strains of violence and the truths they repress operate to instill White settlers both as owners of the land and as dominant over all others. When we come to consider how the status of Asians as foreigners within the nation, or racialized migrants (a tautology since White Anglo Saxons are very rarely confined to the category of migrant) as outsiders whose labour we rely on but who are not entitled to the benefits of citizenship, we can see how the foundations of North American White settler society (stolen land and the commodification of Black bodies as property) is protected by the logic that only Whites are citizens and that citizenship is organized to “make live” White communities and let die others, to use Foucault’s terms (Foucault 2003: 256).

Attempting to capture the various strains that make up White settler society as a racial formation, Andrea Smith (2010: 42) articulates the following three “primary logics of white supremacy” at play in a White settler society: “(1) slaveability/anti-black racism, which anchors capitalism; (2) genocide, which anchors colonialism; and (3) orientalism, which anchors war.” Smith takes issue with such scholars as Jared Sexton and Angela Harris who stress (1) and ignore or minimize (2). But she also takes to task Indigenous American scholars who fight for recognition within a capitalist settler state that remains structured by the logic that White bodies count more than any other. Smith’s categories do not shed light on the nature of violence directed at each group — why for example a widespread killing rage at Indigenous people, gratuitous violence against Blacks and a willingness to abandon Muslim men to torture and solitary confinement? Even more significant, in these apparently discrete practices, we cannot see the three logics sustain each other, as for example when young Black men with few options are recruited into the U.S. military and participate in military rule over racial others. Smith’s categories still require that we work out how at any one time these aspects of White settler society operate to shore up the settler as owner of the land.

It has been difficult for critical scholars to hold all the repressed truths of settler society in mind. We slip easily into analyses that end up privileging one set of claims over the other and claiming innocence in the oppression of others. Are racialized groups implicated in settler colonialism, as are Whites? Are people of colour settlers? If “contempt for blacks is part of the ritual through which immigrant groups become ‘American’” then are all non-Blacks implicated in the subordination of Blacks? (Smith quoted in Smith 2010: 414).

How are Blacks implicated in the colonial project? These are the kinds of questions that have torn apart both scholarly and political coalitions (for a Canadian example of such a conflict, see Lawrence and Dua 2005; Sharma and Wright 2008). As critical scholars, we lose our way politically when we are unable to explore the multiple logics of White settler society as they operate in and through each other.

CONCLUSION: THE RACE TO INNOCENCE

In an article in 1998, Mary Louise Fellows and I explored why solidarity among feminists so often fell apart around the problem of competing marginalities (Fellows and Razack 1998). We proposed that these “moments of conflict and political immobility seem to center around the deeply felt belief that each of us, as women, is not implicated in the subordination of other women” (335). When each woman claimed her own marginality as the worst one, she raced to innocence. While we knew that the race to innocence made it impossible to consider relationships among hierarchical systems and how systems of oppression relied on each other (White supremacy could not function without patriarchy, for instance), we were repeatedly torn apart because we could not feel ourselves as simultaneously marginal and complicit in the subordination of another. We concluded that “the systems of domination that position white, middle-class, heterosexual, nondisabled men at the center continue to operate among all other groups, limiting in various ways what women know and feel about one another” (336).

The race to innocence does not happen simply because we do not know about each other’s realities, although this is crucial. We view our places on the margins as unconnected to each other, an analytical approach that derives from viewing systems of domination as discrete. The analytical problem is compounded by the fact that the race to innocence is productive for us. First, if we do not secure our own place on the margins, we will be erased. For example, if Indigenous peoples do not insist that colonialism is ongoing, the chances are high that this will fall off the scholarly and political table. Second, when we act from our position of marginality, this is the first step towards our own liberation. We must name our oppression in order to challenge it. A third reason why the race to innocence happens, however, is that we hear the narratives of others through dominant frames, and given how productive the race to innocence is for us, we find it hard to develop the critical consciousness that would enable us to cut through dominant representations. It is, for example, hard to see that colonialism is ongoing if we do not know about the elevated rates of deaths in custody or the ever rising incarceration rates for Blacks and Indigenous people, and if we are ill equipped to understand what such patterns reveal.

It goes without saying that the reasons behind the race to innocence are beyond the cognitive. No matter how many times I remind myself to consider how all the systems are operating to position me as both dominant and marginal, I continually race to innocence. Even when writing this conclusion, I found myself anxious to make a case for the things I have been studying (Indigenous deaths in custody and the torture of Muslim men) and made uneasy by the things I had so easily suppressed (the singularity of anti-blackness). When Mary Louise Fellows and I wrote “The Race to Innocence,” we urged feminists to reconsider how systems of domination interlock (rather than intersect), producing us in varying relations of dominance and marginality. Appreciating that as scholars we had settled on yet another cognitive solution to a problem that was so clearly about feelings, we could only recommend, with a nod to Raymond Williams, that we ask how repressions are socially produced (Williams cited in Fellows and Razack 1998: 341: note 5). It is here that I find myself well over a decade later, venturing with trepidation into the unconscious of White settler society while reckoning with what is repressed in my own scholarship.
Power
By Audre Lorde

The difference between poetry and rhetoric
is being ready to kill
yourself
instead of your children.

I am trapped on a desert of raw gunshot wounds
and a dead child dragging his shattered black
face off the edge of my sleep
blood from his punctured cheeks and shoulders
is the only liquid for miles
and my stomach
churns at the imagined taste while
my mouth splits into dry lips
without loyalty or reason
thirsting for the wetness of his blood
as it sinks into the whiteness
of the desert where I am lost
without imagery or magic
trying to make power out of hatred and destruction
trying to heal my dying son with kisses
only the sun will bleach his bones quicker.

A policeman who shot down a ten year old in Queens
stood over the boy with his cop shoes in childish blood
and a voice said “Die you little motherfucker” and
there are tapes to prove it. At his trial
this policeman said in his own defense
“I didn’t notice the size nor nothing else
only the color”. And
there are tapes to prove that, too.

Today that 37 year old white man
with 13 years of police forcing
was set free

James Baldwin

*(More Notes of a Native Son, 1961)*

**The Black Boy Looks at the White Boy**

I walked and I walked
Till I wore out my shoes.
I can’t walk so far, but
Yonder come the blues.

-- Ma Rainey

I FIRST MET NORMAN MAILER about five years ago, in Paris, at the home of Jean Malaquais. Let me bring in at once the theme that will repeat itself over and over throughout this love letter: I was then (and I have not changed much) a very tight, tense, lean, abnormally ambitious, abnormally intelligent, and hungry black cat. It is important that I admit that, at the time I met Norman, I was extremely worried about my career; and a writer who is worried about his career is also fighting for his life. I was approaching the end of a love affair, and I was not taking it very well. Norman and I are alike in this, that we both tend to suspect others of putting us down, and we strike before we’re struck. Only, our styles are very different: I am a black boy from the Harlem streets, and Norman is a middle-class Jew. I am not dragging my personal history into this gratuitously, and I hope I do not need to say that no sneer is implied in the above description of Norman. But these are the facts and in my own relationship to Norman they are crucial facts.

Also, I have no right to talk about Norman without risking a distinctly chilling self-exposure. I take him very seriously, he is very dear to me. And I think I know something about his journey from my black boy’s point of view because my own journey is not really so very different, and also because I have spent most of my life, after all, watching white people and outwitting them, so that I might survive. I think that I know something about the American masculinity which most men of my generation do not know because they have not been menaced by it in the way that I have been. It is still true, alas, that to be an American Negro male is also to be a kind of walking phallic symbol: which means that one pays, in one’s own personality, for the sexual insecurity of others. The relationship, therefore, of a black boy to a white boy is a very complex thing.

There is a difference, though, between Norman and myself in that I think he still imagines that he has something to save, whereas I have never had anything to lose. Or, perhaps I ought to put it another way: the things that most white people imagine that they can salvage from the storm of life is really, in sum, their innocence. It was this commodity precisely which I had to get rid of at once, literally, on pain of death. I am afraid that most of the white people I have ever known impressed me as being in the grip of a weird nostalgia, dreaming of a vanished state of security and order, against which dream, unfailingly and unconsciously, they tested and very often lost their lives. It is a terrible thing to say, but I am afraid that for a very long time the troubles of white people failed to impress me as being real trouble. They put me in mind of children crying because the breast has been taken away. Time and love have modified my tough-boy lack of charity, but the attitude sketched above was my first attitude and I am sure that there is a great deal of it left.

To proceed: two lean cats, one white and one black, met in a French living room. I had heard of him, he had heard of me. And here we were, suddenly, circling around each other. We liked each other at once, but each was frightened that the other would pull rank. He could have pulled rank on me because he was more famous and had more money and also because he was white; but I could have pulled rank on him precisely because I was black and knew more about that periphery he so helplessly maligns in The White Negro than he could ever hope to know. Already, you see, we were trapped in our roles and our attitudes: the toughest kid on the block was meeting the toughest kid on the block. I think that both of us were pretty weary of this grueling and thankless role, I
know that I am; but the roles that we construct are constructed because we feel that they will help us to survive and also, of course, because they fulfill something in our personalities; and one does not, therefore, cease playing a role simply because one has begun to understand it. All roles are dangerous. The world tends to trap and immobilize you in the role you play; and it is not always easy -- in fact, it is always extremely hard -- to maintain a kind of watchful, mocking distance between oneself as one appears to be and oneself as one actually is.

I think that Norman was working on The Deer Park at that time, or had just finished it, and Malaquais, who had translated The Naked and the Dead into French, did not like The Deer Park. I had not then read the book; if I had, I would have been astonished that Norman could have expected Malaquais to like it. What Norman was trying to do in The Deer Park, and quite apart, now, from whether or not he succeeded, could only -- it seems to me -- baffle and annoy a French intellectual who seemed to me essentially rationalistic. Norman has many qualities and faults, but I have never heard anyone accuse him of possessing this particular one. But Malaquais' opinion seemed to mean a great deal to him -- this astonished me, too; and there was a running, good-natured but astringent argument between them, with Malaquais playing the role of the old lion and Norman playing the role of the powerful but clumsy cub. And, I must say, I think that each of them got a great deal of pleasure out of the other's performance.

The night we met, we stayed up very late, and did a great deal of drinking and shouting. But beneath all the shouting and the posing and the mutual showing off, something very wonderful was happening. I was aware of a new and warm presence in my life, for I had met someone I wanted to know, who wanted to know me.

Norman and his wife, Adele, along with a Negro jazz musician friend, and myself, met fairly often during the few weeks that found us all in the same city. I think that Norman had come in from Spain, and he was shortly to return to the States; and it was not long after Norman's departure that I left Paris for Corsica. My memory of that time is both blurred and sharp, and, oddly enough, is principally of Norman -- confident, boastful, exuberant, and loving -- striding through the soft Paris nights like a gladiator. And I think, alas, that I envied him: his success, and his youth, and his love. And this meant that though Norman really wanted to know me, and though I really wanted to know him, I hung back, held fire, danced, and lied. I was not going to come crawling out of my ruined house, all bloody, no, baby, sing no sad songs for me. And the great gap between Norman's state and my own had a terrible effect on our relationship, for it inevitably connected, not to say collided, with that myth of the sexuality of Negroes which Norman, like so many others, refuses to give up. The sexual battleground, if I may call it that, is really the same for everyone; and I, at this point, was just about to be carried off the battleground on my shield, if anyone could find it; so how could I play, in any way whatever, the noble savage?

At the same time, my temperament and my experience in this country had led me to expect very little from most American whites, especially, horribly enough, my friends: so it did not seem worthwhile to challenge, in any real way, Norman's views of life on the periphery, or to put him down for them. I was weary, to tell the truth. I had tried, in the States, to convey something of what it felt like to be a Negro and no one had been able to listen: they wanted their romance. And, anyway, the really ghastly thing about trying to convey to a white man the reality of the Negro experience has nothing whatever to do with the fact of color, but has to do with this man's relationship to his own life. He will face in your life only what he is willing to face in his. Well, this means that one finds oneself tampering with the insides of a stranger, to no purpose, which one probably has no right to do, and I chickened out. And matters were not helped at all by the fact that the Negro jazz musicians, among whom we sometimes found ourselves, who really liked Norman, did not for an instant consider him as being even remotely “hip” and Norman did not know this and I could not tell him. He never broke through to them, at least not as far I know; and they were far too “hip,” if that is the word I want, even to consider breaking through to him. They thought he was a real sweet ofay cat, but a
But at that time it seemed only too clear that love had gone out of the world, and not, as I had thought once, because I was poor and ugly and obscure, but precisely because I was no longer any of these things. What point, then, was there in working if the best I could hope for was the Nobel Prize? And how, indeed, would I be able to keep on working if I could never be released from the prison of my egocentricity? By what act could I escape this horror? For horror it was, let us make no mistake about that.

And, beneath all this, which simplified nothing, was that sense, that suspicion -- which is the glory and torment of every writer -- that what was happening to me might be turned to good account, that I was trembling on the edge of great revelations, was being prepared for a very long journey, and might now begin, having survived my apprenticeship (but had I survived it?), a great work. I might really become a great writer. But in order to do this I would have to sit down at the typewriter again, alone -- I would have to accept my despair: and I could not do it. It really does not help to be a strong-willed person or, anyway, I think it is a great error to misunderstand the nature of the will. In the most important areas of anybody's life, the will usually operates as a traitor. My own will was busily pointing out to me the most fantastically unreal alternatives to my pain, all of which I tried, all of which -- luckily -- failed.

When, late in the evening or early in the morning, Norman and Adele returned to their hotel on the Quai Voltaire, I wandered through Paris, the underside of Paris, drinking, screwing, fighting -- it's a wonder I wasn't killed. And then it was morning, I would somehow be home -- usually, anyway -- and the typewriter would be there, staring at me; and the manuscript of the new novel, which it seemed I would never be able to achieve, and from which clearly I was never going to be released, was scattered all over the floor.

That's the way it is. I think it is the most dangerous point in the life of any artist, his longest, most hideous turning; and especially for a man, an American man, whose principle is action and whose jewel is optimism, who must now accept what certainly then seems to be a gray passivity and an endless despair. It is the point at which many artists lose their minds, or commit suicide, or throw themselves into good works, or try to enter politics. For all of this
is happening not only in the wilderness of the soul, but in the real world which accomplishes its seductions not by offering you opportunities to be wicked but by offering opportunities to be good, to be active and effective, to be admired and central and apparently loved.

Norman came on to America, and I went to Corsica. We wrote each other a few times. I confided to Norman that I was very apprehensive about the reception of Giovanni’s Room, and he was good enough to write some very encouraging things about it when it came out. The critics had jumped on him with both their left feet when he published The Deer Park -- which I still had not read -- and this created a kind of bond, or strengthened the bond already existing between us. About a year and several overflowing wastebaskets later, I, too, returned to America, not vastly improved by having been out of it, but not knowing where else to go; and one day, while I was sitting dully in my house, Norman called me from Connecticut. A few people were going to be there -- for the weekend -- and he wanted me to come, too. We had not seen each other since Paris.

Well, I wanted to go, that is, I wanted to see Norman; but I did not want to see any people, and so the tone of my acceptance was not very enthusiastic. I realized that he felt this, but I did not know what to do about it. He gave me train schedules and hung up.

Getting to Connecticut would have been no hassle if I could have pulled myself together to get to the train. And I was sorry, as I meandered around my house and time flew and trains left, that I had not been more honest with Norman and told him exactly how I felt. But I had not known how to do this, or it had not really occurred to me to do it, especially not over the phone.

So there was another phone call, I forget who called whom, which went something like this:

N: Don’t feel you have to. I’m not trying to bug you.

J: It’s not that. It’s just --

N: You don’t really want to come, do you?

J: I don’t really feel up to it.

N: I understand. I guess you just don’t like the Connecticut gentry.

J: Well -- don’t you ever come to the city?

N: Sure. We’ll see each other.

J: I hope so. I’d like to see you.

N: Okay, till then.

And he hung up. I thought, I ought to write him a letter, but of course I did nothing of the sort. It was around this time I went South, I think; anyway, we did not see each other for a long time.

But I thought about him a great deal. The grapevine keeps all of us advised of the others’ movements, so I knew when Norman left Connecticut for New York, heard that he had been present at this or that party and what he had said: usually something rude, often something penetrating, sometimes something so hilariously silly that it was difficult to believe he had been serious. (This was my reaction when I first heard his famous running-for-President remark. I dismissed it. I was wrong.) Or he had been seen in this or that Village spot, in which unfailingly there would be someone -- out of spite, idleness, envy, exasperation, out of the bottomless, eerie, aimless hostility which characterizes almost every bar in New York, to speak only of bars -- to put him down. I heard of a couple of fist-fights, and, of course, I was always encountering people who hated his guts. These people always mildly surprised me, and so did the news of his fights: it was hard for me to imagine that anyone could really dislike Norman, anyone, that is, who had encountered him personally. I knew of one fight he had had, forced on him, apparently, by a blow-hard Village type whom I
considered rather pathetic. I didn’t blame Norman for this fight, but I couldn’t help wondering why he bothered to rise to such a shapeless challenge. It seemed simpler, as I was always telling myself, just to stay out of Village bars.

And people talked about Norman with a kind of avid glee, which I found very ugly. Pleasure made their saliva flow, they sprayed and all but drooled, and their eyes shone with that blood-lust which is the only real tribute the mediocre are capable of bringing to the extraordinary. Many of the people who claimed to be seeing Norman all the time impressed me as being, to tell the truth, pitifully far beneath him. But this is also true, alas, of much of my own entourage. The people who are in one’s life or merely continually in one’s presence reveal a great deal about one’s needs and terrors. Also, one’s hopes.

I was not, however, on the scene. I was on the road -- not quite, I trust, in the sense that Kerouac’s boys are; but I presented, certainly, a moving target. And I was reading Norman Mailer. Before I had met him, I had only read The Naked and The Dead, The White Negro, and Barbary Shore -- I think this is right, though it may be that I only read The White Negro later and confuse my reading of that piece with some of my discussions with Norman. Anyway, I could not, with the best will in the world, make any sense out of The White Negro and, in fact, it was hard for me to imagine that this essay had been written by the same man who wrote the novels. Both The Naked and The Dead and (for the most part) Barbary Shore are written in a lean, spare, muscular prose which accomplishes almost exactly what it sets out to do. Even Barbary Shore, which loses itself in its last half (and which deserves, by the way, far more serious treatment than it has received) never becomes as down-right impenetrable as The White Negro does.

Now, much of this, I told myself, had to do with my resistance to the title, and with a kind of fury that so antique a vision of the blacks should, at this late hour, and in so many borrowed heirlooms, be stepping off the A train. But I was also baffled by the passion with which Norman appeared to be imitating so many people inferior to himself, i.e., Kerouac, and all the other Suzuki rhythm boys. From them, indeed, I expected nothing more than their pablum-clogged cries of Kicks! and Holy! It seemed very clear to me that their glorification of the orgasm was but a way of avoiding all of the terrors of life and love. But Norman knew better, had to know better. The Naked and The Dead, Barbary Shore, and The Deer Park proved it. In each of these novels, there is a toughness and subtlety of conception, and a sense of the danger and complexity of human relationships which one will search for in vain, not only in the work produced by the aforementioned coterie, but in most of the novels produced by Norman’s contemporaries. What in the world, then, was he doing, slumming so outrageously, in such a dreary crowd?

For, exactly because he knew better, and in exactly the same way that no one can become more lewdly vicious than an imitation libertine, Norman felt compelled to carry their mystique further than they had, to be more “hip,” or more “beat,” to dominate, in fact, their dreaming field; and since this mystique depended on a total rejection of life, and insisted on the fulfillment of an infantile dream of love, the mystique could only be extended into violence. No one is more dangerous than he who imagines himself pure in heart: for his purity, by definition, is unassailable.

But why should it be necessary to borrow the Depression language of deprived Negroes, which eventually evolved into jive and bop talk, in order to justify such a grim system of delusions? Why malign the sorely menaced sexuality of Negroes in order to justify the white man’s own sexual panic? Especially as, in Norman’s case, and as indicated by his work, he has a very real sense of sexual responsibility, and, even, odd as it may sound to some, of sexual morality, and a genuine commitment to life. None of his people, I beg you to notice, spend their lives on the road. They really become entangled with each other, and with life. They really suffer, they spill real blood, they have real lives to lose. This is no small achievement; in fact, it is absolutely rare. No matter how uneven one judges Norman’s work to be, all of it is genuine work. No matter how harshly one judges it, it is the work of a genuine
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tlist, and an absolutely first-rate talent.

Which makes the questions I have tried to raise -- or, rather, the questions which Norman Mailer irresistibly represents -- all the more troubling and terrible. I certainly do not know the answers, and even if I did, this is probably not the place to state them.

But I have a few ideas. Here is Kerouac, ruminating on what I take to be the loss of the garden of Eden:

At lilac evening I walked with every muscle aching among the lights of 27th and Welton in the Denver colored section, wishing I were a Negro, feeling that the best the white world had offered was not enough ecstasy for me, not enough life, joy, kicks, darkness, music, not enough night. I wished I were a Denver Mexican, or even a poor overworked Jap, anything but what I so drearily was, a "white man" disillusioned. All my life I'd had white ambitions. . . . I passed the dark porches of Mexican and Negro homes; soft voices were there, occasionally the dusky knee of some mysterious sensuous gal; and dark faces of the men behind rose arbors. Little children sat like sages in ancient rocking chairs.

Now, this is absolute nonsense, of course, objectively considered, and offensive nonsense at that: I would hate to be in Kerouac's shoes if he should ever be mad enough to read this aloud from the stage of Harlem's Apollo Theater.

And yet there is real pain in it, and real loss, however thin; and it is thin, like soup too long diluted; thin because it does not refer to reality, but to a dream. Compare it, at random, with any old blues:

Backwater blues done caused me
To pack my things and go.

'Cause my house fell down
And I can't live there no mo'.

"Man," said a Negro musician to me once, talking about Norman, "the only trouble with that cat is that he's white." This does not mean exactly what it says -- or, rather, it does mean exactly what it says, and not what it might be taken to mean -- and it is a very shrewd observation. What my friend meant was that to become a Negro man, let alone a Negro artist, one had to make oneself up as one went along. This had to be done in the not-at-all-metaphorical teeth of the world's determination to destroy you. The world had prepared no place for you, and if the world had its way, no place would ever exist. Now, this is true for everyone, but, in the case of a Negro, this truth is absolutely naked: if he deludes himself about it, he will die. This is not the way this truth presents itself to white men, who believe the world is theirs and who, albeit unconsciously, expect the world to help them in the achievement of their identity. But the world does not do this -- for anyone; the world is not interested in anyone's identity. And, therefore, the anguish which can overtake a white man comes in the middle of his life, when he must make the almost inconceivable effort to divest himself of everything he has ever expected or believed, when he must take himself apart and put himself together again, walking out of the world, into limbo, or into what certainly looks like limbo. This cannot yet happen to any Negro of Norman's age, for the reason that his delusions and defenses are either absolutely impenetrable by this time, or he has failed to survive them. "I want to know how power works," Norman once said to me, "how it really works, in detail." Well, I know how power works, it has worked on me, and if I didn't know how power worked, I would be dead. And it goes without saying, perhaps, that I have simply never been able to afford myself any illusions concerning the manipulation of that power. My revenge, I decided very early, would be to achieve a power which outlasts kingdoms.

II

When I finally saw Norman again, I was beginning to suspect daylight at the end of my long tunnel, it was a summer day, I was on my way back to Paris, and I was very cheerful. We were at an afternoon party, Norman was standing in the kitchen, a drink in
his hand, holding forth for the benefit of a small group of people. There seemed something different about him, it was the belligerence of his stance, and the really rather pontifical tone of his voice. I had only seen him, remember, in Malaquais’ living room, which Malaquais indefatigably dominates, and on various terraces and in various dives in Paris. I do not mean that there was anything unfriendly about him. On the contrary, he was smiling and having a ball. And yet -- he was leaning against the refrigerator, rather as though he had his back to the wall, ready to take on all comers.

Norman has a trick, at least with me, of watching, somewhat ironically, as you stand on the edge of the crowd around him, waiting for his attention. I suppose this ought to be exasperating, but in fact I find it rather endearing, because it is so transparent and because he gets such a bang out of being the center of attention. So do I, of course, at least some of the time.

We talked, bantered, a little tensely, made the usual, doomed effort to bring each other up to date on what we had been doing. I did not want to talk about my novel, which was only just beginning to seem to take shape, and, therefore, did not dare ask him if he were working on a novel. He seemed very pleased to see me, and I was pleased to see him, but I also had the feeling that he had made up his mind about me, adversely, in some way. It was as though he were saying, Okay, so now I know who you are, baby.

I was taking a boat in a few days, and I asked him to call me.

“Oh, no,” he said, grinning, and thrusting that fore-finger at me, “you call me.”

“That’s fair enough,” I said, and I left the party and went back to Paris. While I was out of the country, Norman published Advertisements for Myself, which presently crossed the ocean to the apartment of James Jones. Bill Styron was also in Paris at that time, and one evening the three of us sat in Jim’s living room, reading aloud, in a kind of drunken, masochistic fascination, Norman’s judgment of our personalities and our work. Actually, I came off best, I suppose; there was less about me, and it was less venomous. But the condescension infuriated me; also, to tell the truth, my feelings were hurt. I felt that if that was the way Norman felt about me, he should have told me so. He had said that I was incapable of saying “F--- you” to the reader. My first temptation was to send him a cablegram which would disabuse him of that notion, at least insofar as one reader was concerned. But then I thought, No, I would be cool about it, and fail to react as he so clearly wanted me to. Also, I must say, his judgment of myself seemed so wide of the mark and so childish that it was hard to stay angry. I wondered what in the world was going on in his mind. Did he really suppose that he had now become the builder and destroyer of reputations, And of my reputation?

We met in the Actors’ Studio one afternoon, after a performance of The Deer Park -- which I deliberately arrived too late to see, since I really did not know how I was going to react to Norman, and didn’t want to betray myself by clobbering his play. When the discussion ended, I stood, again on the edge of the crowd around him, waiting. Over someone’s shoulder, our eyes met, and Norman smiled.

“We’ve got something to talk about,” I told him.

“I figured that,” he said, smiling.

We went to a bar, and sat opposite each other. I was relieved to discover that I was not angry, not even (as far as I could tell) at the bottom of my heart. But, “Why did you write those things about me?”

“Well, I’ll tell you about that,” he said -- Norman has several accents, and I think this was his Texas one -- “I sort of figured you had it coming to you.”

“Why?”

“Well, I think there’s some truth in it.”
“Well, if you felt that way, why didn’t you ever say so -- to me?”

“Well, I figured if this was going to break up our friendship, something else would come along to break it up just as fast.”

I couldn’t disagree with that.

“You’re the only one I kind of regret hitting so hard,” he said, with a grin. “I think I -- probably -- wouldn’t say it quite that way now.”

With this, I had to be content. We sat for perhaps an hour, talking of other things and, again, I was struck by his stance: leaning on the table, shoulders hunched, seeming, really, to roll like a boxer’s, and his hands moving as though he were dealing with a sparring partner. And we were talking of physical courage, and the necessity of never letting another guy get the better of you.

I laughed. “Norman, I can’t go through the world the way you do because I haven’t got your shoulders.”

He grinned, as though I were his pupil. “But you’re a pretty tough little mother, too,” he said, and referred to one of the grimmer of my Village misadventures, a misadventure which certainly proved that I had a dangerously sharp tongue, but which didn’t really prove anything about my courage. Which, anyway, I had long ago given up trying to prove.

I did not see Norman again until Provincetown, just after his celebrated brush with the police there, which resulted, according to Norman, in making the climate of Provincetown as “mellow as Jello.” The climate didn’t seem very different to me -- dull natives, dull tourists, malevolent policemen; I certainly, in any case, would never have dreamed of testing Norman’s sanguine conclusion. But we had a great time, lying around the beach, and driving about, and we began to be closer than we had been for a long time.

It was during this Provincetown visit that I realized, for the first time, during a long exchange Norman and I had, in a kitchen, at someone else’s party, that Norman was really fascinated by the nature of political power. But, though he said so, I did not really believe that he was fascinated by it as a possibility for himself. He was then doing the great piece on the Democratic convention which was published in Esquire, and I put his fascination down to that. I tend not to worry about writers as long as they are working -- which is not as romantic as it may sound -- and he seemed quite happy with his wife, his family, himself. I declined, naturally, to rise at dawn, as he apparently often did, to go running or swimming or boxing, but Norman seemed to get a great charge out of these admirable pursuits and didn’t put me down too hard for my comparative decadence.

He and Adele and the two children took me to the plane one afternoon, the tiny plane which shuttles from Provincetown to Boston. It was a great day, clear and sunny, and that was the way I felt: for it seemed to me that we had all, at last, re-established our old connection.

And then I heard that Norman was running for mayor, which I dismissed as a joke and refused to believe until it became hideously clear that it was not a joke at all. I was furious. I thought, You son of a bitch, you’re copping out. You’re one of the very few writers around who might really become a great writer, who might help to excavate the buried consciousness of this country, and you want to settle for being the lousy mayor of New York. It’s not your job. And I don’t at all mean to suggest that writers are not responsible to and for -- in any case, always for -- the social order. I don’t, for that matter, even mean to suggest that Norman would have made a particularly bad Mayor, though I confess that I simply cannot see him in this role. And there is probably some truth in the suggestion, put forward by Norman and others, that the shock value of having such a man in such an office, or merely running for such an office, would have had a salutary effect on the life of this city -- particularly, I must say, as relates to our young people, who are certainly in desperate need of adults who love them and take them seriously, and whom they can respect. (Serious citizens may not respect Norman, but young people do, and do not respect the serious citizens; and their instincts are quite sound.)
But I do not feel that a writer's responsibility can be discharged in this way. I do not think, if one is a writer, that one escapes it by trying to become something else. One does not become something else: one becomes nothing. And what is crucial here is that the writer, however unwillingly, always, somewhere, knows this. There is no structure he can build strong enough to keep out this self-knowledge. What has happened, however, time and time again, is that the fantasy structure the writer builds in order to escape his central responsibility operates not as his fortress, but his prison, and he perishes within it. Or: the structure he has built becomes so stifling, so lonely, so false, and acquires such a violent and dangerous life of its own, that he can break out of it only by bringing the entire structure down. With a great crash, inevitably, and on his own head, and on the heads of those closest to him. It is like smashing the windows one second before one asphyxiates; it is like burning down the house in order, at last, to be free of it. And this, I think, really, to touch upon it lightly, is the key to the events at that monstrous, baffling, and so publicized party. Nearly everyone in the world -- or nearly everyone, at least, in this extraordinary city -- was there: policemen, Mafia types, the people whom we quaintly refer to as “beatniks,” writers, actors, editors, politicians, and gossip columnists. It must be admitted that it was a considerable achievement to have brought so many unlikely types together under one roof; and, in spite of everything, I can't help wishing that I had been there to witness the mutual bewilderment. But the point is that no politician would have dreamed of giving such a party in order to launch his mayoralty campaign. Such an imaginative route is not usually an attribute of politicians. In addition, the price one pays for pursuing any profession, or calling, is an intimate knowledge of its ugly side. It is scarcely worth observing that political activity is often, to put it mildly, pungent, and I think that Norman, perhaps for the first time, really doubted his ability to deal with such a world, and blindly struck his way out of it. We do not, in this country now, have much taste for, or any real sense of, the extremes human beings can reach; time will improve us in this regard; but in the meantime the general fear of experience is one of the reasons that the American writer has so peculiarly difficult and dangerous a time.

One can never really see into the heart, the mind, the soul of another. Norman is my very good friend, but perhaps I do not really understand him at all, and perhaps everything I have tried to suggest in the foregoing is false. I do not think so, but it may be. One thing, however, I am certain is not false, and that is simply the fact of his being a writer, and the incalculable potential he as a writer contains. His work, after all, is all that will be left when the newspapers are yellowed, all the gossip columnists silenced, and all the cocktail parties over, and when Norman and you and I are dead. I know that this point of view is not terribly fashionable these days, but I think we do have a responsibility, not only to ourselves and to our own time, but to those who are coming after us. (I refuse to believe that no one is coming after us.) And I suppose that this responsibility can only be discharged by dealing as truthfully as we know how with our present fortunes, these present days. So that my concern with Norman, finally, has to do with how deeply he has understood these last sad and stormy events. If he has understood them, then he is richer and we are richer, too; if he has not understood them, we are all much poorer. For, though it clearly needs to be brought into focus, he has a real vision of ourselves as we are, and it cannot be too often repeated in this country now, that, where there is no vision, the people perish.
An Open Letter to Mary Daly

Audre Lorde (1979)

The following letter was written to Mary Daly, author of Gyn/Ecology,* on May 6, 1979. Four months later, having received no reply, I open it to the community of women. —Audre Lorde in Sister Outsider

DEAR MARY,

With a moment of space in this wild and bloody spring,** I want to speak the words I have had in mind for you. I had hoped that our paths might cross and we could sit down together and talk, but this has not happened.

I wish you strength and satisfaction in your eventual victory over the repressive forces of the University in Boston. I am glad so many women attended the speak—out, and hope that this show of joined power will make more space for you to grow and be within.

Thank you for having Gyn/Ecology sent to me. So much of it is full of import, useful, generative, and provoking. As in Beyond God The Father, many of your analyses are strengthening and helpful to me. Therefore, it is because of what you have given to me in the past work that I write this letter to you now, hoping to share with you the benefits of my insights as you have shared the benefits of yours with me.

This letter has been delayed because of my grave reluctance to reach out to you, for what I want us to chew upon here is neither easy nor simple. The history of white women who are unable to hear Black women’s words, or to maintain dialogue with us, is long and discouraging. But for me to assume that you will not hear me represents not only history, perhaps, but an old pattern of relating, sometimes protective and sometimes dysfunctional, which we, as women shaping our future, are in the process of shattering and passing beyond, I hope.

I believe in your good faith toward all women, in your vision of a future within which we can all flourish, and in your commitment to the hard and often painful work necessary to effect change. In this spirit I invite you to a joint clarification of some of the differences which lie between us as a Black and a white Á•woman.

When I started reading Gyn/Ecology, I was truly excited by the vision behind your words and nodded my head as you spoke in your First Passage of myth and mystification. Your words on the nature and function of the Goddess, as well as the ways in which her face has been obscured, agreed with what I myself have discovered in my searches through African myth/legend/religion for the true nature of old female power.

So I wondered, why doesn’t Mary deal with Afrekete as an example? Why are her goddess images only white, western european, judea—christian? Where was Afrekete, Y’emanje, Oyo, and Mawulisa? Where were the warrior goddesses of the Vodun, the Dahomeian Amazons and the warrior—women of Dan? Well, I thought, Mary has made a conscious decision to narrow her scope and to deal only with the ecology of western european women.

Then I came to the first three chapters of your Second Passage, and it was obvious that you were dealing with noneuropean women, but only as victims and preyers—upon each other. I began to feel my history and my mythic background distorted by the absence of any images of my foremothers in power. Your inclusion of African genital mutilation was an important and necessary piece in any consideration of female ecology, and too little has been written about it. To imply, however, that all women suffer the same oppression simply because we are women is to lose sight of the many varied tools of patriarchy. It is to ignore how those tools are used by women without awareness against each other.

To dismiss our Black foremothers may well be to dismiss where european women learned to love. As an African—american woman in white patriarchy, I am used to having my archetypal

* Gyn/Ecology
** A reference to the political and social climate of that time, which was marked by significant events like the Stonewall Riots and the women's movement.
experience distorted and trivialized, but it is terribly painful to feel it being done by a woman whose knowledge so much touches my own.

When I speak of knowledge, as you know, I am speaking of that dark and true depth which understanding serves, waits upon, and makes accessible through language to ourselves and others. It is this depth within each of us that nurtures vision.

What you excluded from Gyn/Ecology dismissed my heritage and the heritage of all other noneuropean women, and denied the real connections that exist between all of us.

It is obvious that you have done a tremendous amount of work for this book. But simply because so little material on nonwhite female power and symbol exists in white women’s words from a radical feminist perspective, to exclude this aspect of connection from even comment in your work is to deny the fountain of noneuropean female strength and power that nurtures each of our visions. It is to make a point by choice.

Then, to realize that the only quotations from Black women’s words were the ones you used to introduce your chapter on African genital mutilation made me question why you needed to use them at all. For my part, I felt that you had in fact misused my words, utilized them only to testify against myself as a woman of Color. For my words which you used were no more, nor less, illustrative of this chapter than “Poetry Is Not a Luxury” or any number of my other poems might have been of many other parts of Gyn/Ecology.

So the question arises in my mind, Mary, do you ever really read the work of Black women? Did you ever read my words, or did you merely finger through them for quotations which you thought might valuably support an already conceived idea concerning some old and distorted connection between us? This is not a rhetorical question.

To me, this feels like another instance of the knowledge, crone—ology and work of women of Color being ghettoized by a white woman dealing only out of a patriarchal western european frame of reference. Even your words on page 49 of Gyn/Ecology, “The strength which Self—centering women find, in finding our Background, is our own strength, which we give back to our Selves,” have a different ring as we remember the old traditions of power and strength and nurturance found in the female bonding of African women. It is there to be tapped by all women who do not fear the revelation of connection to themselves.

Have you read my work, and the work of other Black women, for what it could give you? Or did you hunt through only to find words that would legitimize your chapter on African genital mutilation in the eyes of other Black women? And if so, then why not use our words to legitimize or illustrate the other places where we connect in our being and becoming? If, on the other hand, it was not Black women you were attempting to reach, in what way did our words illustrate your point for white women?

Mary, I ask that you be aware of how this serves the destructive forces of racism and separation between women — the assumption that the herstory and myth of white women is the legitimate and sole herstory and myth of all women to call upon for power and background, and that nonwhite women and our herstories are noteworthy only as decorations, or examples of female victimization. I ask that you be aware of the effect that this dismissal has upon the community of Black women and other women of Color, and how it devalues your own words. This dismissal does not essentially differ from the specialized devaluations that make Black women prey, for instance, to the murders even now happening in your own city. When patriarchy dismisses us, it encourages our murderers. When radical lesbian feminist theory dismisses us, it encourages its own demise.

This dismissal stands as a real block to communication between us. This block makes it far easier to turn away from you completely than to attempt to understand the thinking behind your choices.
Should the next step be war between us, or separation? Assimilation within a solely western european herstory is not acceptable.

Mary, I ask that you re—member what is dark and ancient and divine within yourself that aids your speaking. As outsiders, we need each other for support and connection and all the other necessities of living on the borders. But in order to come together we must recognize each other. Yet I feel that since you have so completely un—recognized me, perhaps I have been in error concerning you and no longer recognize you.

I feel you do celebrate differences between white women as a creative force toward change, rather than a reason for misunderstanding and separation. But you fail to recognize that, as women, those differences expose all women to various forms. and degrees of patriarchal oppression, some of which we share and some of which we do not. For instance, surely you know that for nonwhite women in this country, there is an 80 percent fatality rate from breast cancer; three times the number of unnecessary eventrations, hysterectomies and sterilizations as for white women; three times as many chances of being raped, murdered, or assaulted as exist for white women. These are statistical facts, not coincidences nor paranoid fantasies.

Within the community of women, racism is a reality force in my life as it is not in yours. The white women with hoods on in Ohio handing out KKK literature on the street may not like what you have to say, but they will shoot me on sight. (If you and I were to walk into a classroom of women in Dismal Gulch, Alabama, where the only thing they knew about each of us was that we were both Lesbian/Radical/Feminist, you would see exactly what I mean.)

The oppression of women knows no ethnic nor racial boundaries, true, but that does not mean it is identical within those differences. Nor do the reservoirs of our ancient power know these boundaries. To deal with one without even alluding to the other is to distort our commonality as well as our difference.

For then beyond sisterhood is still racism.

We first met at the MLA panel, “The Transformation of Silence Into Language and Action.” This letter attempts to break a silence which I had imposed upon myself shortly before that date. I had decided never again to speak to white women about racism. I felt it was wasted energy because of destructive guilt and defensiveness, and because whatever I had to say might better be said by white women to one another at far less emotional cost to the speaker, and probably with a better hearing. But I would like not to destroy you in my consciousness, not to have to. So as a sister Hag, I ask you to speak to my perceptions.

Whether or not you do, Mary, again I thank you for what I have learned from you.

This letter is in repayment.

In the hands of Afrekete,
Audre Lorde


**In the spring of 1979, twelve Black women were murdered in the Boston area.
A Herstory of the #BlackLivesMatter Movement
(from http://blacklivesmatter.com)

I created #BlackLivesMatter with Patrisse Cullors and Opal Tometi, two of my sisters, as a call to action for Black people after 17-year-old Trayvon Martin was post-humously placed on trial for his own murder and the killer, George Zimmerman, was not held accountable for the crime he committed. It was a response to the anti-Black racism that permeates our society and also, unfortunately, our movements.

Black Lives Matter is an ideological and political intervention in a world where Black lives are systematically and intentionally targeted for demise. It is an affirmation of Black folks’ contributions to this society, our humanity, and our resilience in the face of deadly oppression.

We were humbled when cultural workers, artists, designers and techies offered their labor and love to expand #BlackLivesMatter beyond a social media hashtag. Opal, Patrisse, and I created the infrastructure for this movement project—moving the hashtag from social media to the streets. Our team grew through a very successful Black Lives Matter ride, led and designed by Patrisse Cullors and Darnell L. Moore, organized to support the movement that is growing in St. Louis, MO, after 18-year old Mike Brown was killed at the hands of Ferguson Police Officer Darren Wilson. We’ve hosted national conference calls focused on issues of critical importance to Black people working hard for the liberation of our people. We’ve connected people across the country working to end the various forms of injustice impacting our people. We’ve created space for the celebration and humanization of Black lives.

The Theft of Black Queer Women’s Work

As people took the #BlackLivesMatter demand into the streets, mainstream media and corporations also took up the call, #BlackLivesMatter appeared in an episode of Law & Order: SVU in amash up containing the Paula Deen racism scandal and the tragedy of the murder of Trayvon Martin.

Suddenly, we began to come across varied adaptations of our work—all lives matter, brown lives matter, migrant lives matter, women’s lives matter, and on and on. While imitation is said to be the highest form of flattery, I was surprised when an organization called to ask if they could use “Black Lives Matter” in one of their campaigns. We agreed to it, with the caveat that a) as a team, we preferred that we not use the meme to celebrate the imprisonment of any individual and b) that it was important to us they acknowledged the genesis of #BlackLivesMatter. I was surprised when they did exactly the opposite and then justified their actions by saying they hadn’t used the “exact” slogan and, therefore, they deemed it okay to take our work, use it as their own, fail to credit where it came from, and then use it to applaud incarceration.

I was surprised when a community institution wrote asking us to provide materials and action steps for an art show they were curating, entitled “Our Lives Matter.” When questioned about who was involved and why they felt the need to change the very specific call and demand around Black lives to “our lives,” I was told the artists decided it needed to be more inclusive of all people of color. I was even more surprised when, in the promotion of their event, one of the artists conducted an interview that completely erased the origins of their work—rooted in the labor and love of queer Black women.

Pause.

When you design an event / campaign / et cetera based on the work of queer Black women, don’t invite them to participate in shaping it, but ask them to provide materials and ideas for next steps for said event, that is racism in practice. It’s also hetero-patriarchal. Straight men, unintentionally or intentionally, have taken the work of queer Black women and erased our contributions. Perhaps if we were the charismatic Black men many are rallying around these days, it would have been a different story, but being
Black queer women in this society (and apparently within these movements) tends to equal invisibility and non-relevancy.

We completely expect those who benefit directly and improperly from White supremacy to try and erase our existence. We fight that every day. But when it happens amongst our allies, we are baffled, we are saddened, and we are enraged. And it’s time to have the political conversation about why that’s not okay.

We are grateful to our allies who have stepped up to the call that Black lives matter, and taken it as an opportunity to not just stand in solidarity with us, but to investigate the ways in which anti-Black racism is perpetuated in their own communities. We are also grateful to those allies who were willing to engage in critical dialogue with us about this unfortunate and problematic dynamic. And for those who we have not yet had the opportunity to engage with around the adaptations of the Black Lives Matter call, please consider the following points.

**Broadening the Conversation to Include Black Life**

Black Lives Matter is a unique contribution that goes beyond extrajudicial killings of Black people by police and vigilantes. It goes beyond the narrow nationalism that can be prevalent within some Black communities, which merely call on Black people to love Black, live Black and buy Black, keeping straight cis Black men in the front of the movement while our sisters, queer and trans and disabled folk take up roles in the background or not at all. Black Lives Matter affirms the lives of Black queer and trans folks, disabled folks, Black-undocumented folks, folks with records, women and all Black lives along the gender spectrum. It centers those that have been marginalized within Black liberation movements. It is a tactic to (re)build the Black liberation movement.

When we say Black Lives Matter, we are talking about the ways in which Black people are deprived of our basic human rights and dignity. It is an acknowledgement Black poverty and genocide is state violence. It is an acknowledgment that 1 million Black people are locked in cages in this country—one half of all people in prisons or jails—is an act of state violence. It is an acknowledgment that Black women continue to bear the burden of a relentless assault on our children and our families and that assault is an act of state violence. Black queer and trans folks bearing a unique burden in a hetero-patriarchal society that disposes of us like garbage and simultaneously fetishizes us and profits off of us is state violence; the fact that 500,000 Black people in the US are undocumented immigrants and relegated to the shadows is state violence; the fact that Black girls are used as negotiating chips during times of conflict and war is state violence; Black folks living with disabilities and different abilities bear the burden of state-sponsored Darwinian experiments that attempt to squeeze us into boxes of normality defined by White supremacy is state violence; And the fact is that the lives of Black people—not ALL people—exist within these conditions is consequence of state violence.

*When Black people get free, everybody gets free*

#BlackLivesMatter doesn’t mean your life isn’t important—it means that Black lives, which are seen as without value within White supremacy, are important to your liberation. Given the disproportionate impact state violence has on Black lives, we understand that when Black people in this country get free, the benefits will be wide reaching and transformative for society as a whole. When we are able to end hyper-criminalization and sexualization of Black people and end the poverty, control, and surveillance of Black people, every single person in this world has a better shot at getting and staying free. When Black people get free, everybody gets free. This is why we call on Black people and our allies to take up the call that Black lives matter. We’re not saying Black lives are more important than other lives, or that other lives are not criminalized and oppressed in various ways. We remain in active solidarity with all oppressed people who are fighting for their liberation and we know that our destinies are intertwined.

And, to keep it real—it is appropriate and necessary to have strategy and action centered around Blackness without other non-
Black communities of color, or White folks for that matter, needing to find a place and a way to center themselves within it. It is appropriate and necessary for us to acknowledge the critical role that Black lives and struggles for Black liberation have played in inspiring and anchoring, through practice and theory, social movements for the liberation of all people. The women’s movement, the Chicano liberation movement, queer movements, and many more have adopted the strategies, tactics and theory of the Black liberation movement. And if we are committed to a world where all lives matter, we are called to support the very movement that inspired and activated so many more. That means supporting and acknowledging Black lives.

Progressive movements in the United States have made some unfortunate errors when they push for unity at the expense of really understanding the concrete differences in context, experience and oppression. In other words, some want unity without struggle. As people who have our minds stayed on freedom, we can learn to fight anti-Black racism by examining the ways in which we participate in it, even unintentionally, instead of the worn out and sloppy practice of drawing lazy parallels of unity between peoples with vastly different experiences and histories.

When we deploy “All Lives Matter” as to correct an intervention specifically created to address anti-blackness, we lose the ways in which the state apparatus has built a program of genocide and repression mostly on the backs of Black people—beginning with the theft of millions of people for free labor—and then adapted it to control, murder, and profit off of other communities of color and immigrant communities. We perpetuate a level of White supremacist domination by reproducing a tired trope that we are all the same, rather than acknowledging that non-Black oppressed people in this country are both impacted by racism and domination, and simultaneously, BENEFIT from anti-black racism.

When you drop “Black” from the equation of whose lives matter, and then fail to acknowledge it came from somewhere, you further a legacy of erasing Black lives and Black contributions from our movement legacy. And consider whether or not when dropping the Black you are, intentionally or unintentionally, erasing Black folks from the conversation or homogenizing very different experiences. The legacy and prevalence of anti-Black racism and hetero-patriarchy is a lynch pin holding together this unsustainable economy. And that’s not an accidental analogy.

In 2014, hetero-patriarchy and anti-Black racism within our movement is real and felt. It’s killing us and it’s killing our potential to build power for transformative social change. When you adopt the work of queer women of color, don’t name or recognize it, and promote it as if it has no history of its own such actions are problematic. When I use Assata’s powerful demand in my organizing work, I always begin by sharing where it comes from, sharing about Assata’s significance to the Black Liberation Movement, what it’s political purpose and message is, and why it’s important in our context.

When you adopt Black Lives Matter and transform it into something else (if you feel you really need to do that—see above for the arguments not to), it’s appropriate politically to credit the lineage from which your adapted work derived. It’s important that we work together to build and acknowledge the legacy of Black contributions to the struggle for human rights. If you adapt Black Lives Matter, use the opportunity to talk about its inception and political framing. Lift up Black lives as an opportunity to connect struggles across race, class, gender, nationality, sexuality and disability.

And, perhaps more importantly, when Black people cry out in defense of our lives, which are uniquely, systematically, and savagely targeted by the state, we are asking you, our family, to stand with us in affirming Black lives. Not just all lives. Black lives. Please do not change the conversation by talking about how your life matters, too. It does, but we need less watered down unity and a more active solidarities with us, Black people, unwaveringly, in defense of our humanity. Our collective futures depend on it. ||
In defense of black rage: Michael Brown, police and the American dream

Brittney Cooper

On Saturday a Ferguson, Missouri, police officer shot and killed Michael Brown, an unarmed teenager on his way to college this week. Brown was shot multiple times, though his hands were in the air. His uncovered body was left in the street for hours, as a crowd from his neighborhood gathered to stand vigil. Then they marched down to the police station. On Sunday evening, some folks in the crowd looted a couple of stores and threw bottles at the police. Monday morning was marked by peaceful protests. The people of Ferguson are angry. Outraged. The officer’s story is dubious. Any black kid with sense knows it is futile to reach into an officer’s vehicle and take his gun. That story is only plausible to people who believe that black people are animals, that black men go looking for cops to pick fights with. Absurdity. Eyewitness accounts like these make far more sense.

It seems far easier to focus on the few looters who have reacted unproductively to this tragedy than to focus on the killing of Michael Brown. Perhaps looting seems like a thing we can control. I refuse. I refuse to condemn the folks engaged in these acts, because I respect black rage. I respect black people’s right to cry out, shout and be mad as hell that another one of our kids is dead at the hands of the police. Moreover I refuse the lie that the opportunism of a few in any way justifies or excuses the murderous opportunism undertaken by this as yet anonymous officer.

The police mantra is “to serve and to protect.” But with black folks, we know that’s not the mantra. The mantra for many, many officers when dealing with black people is apparently “kill or be killed.”

It is that deep irrational fear of young black men that continues to sit with me. Here’s the thing: I do not believe that most white people see black people and say, “I hate black people.” Racism is not that tangible, that explicit. I do not believe most white people hate most black people. I do not believe that most police officers seek to do harm or consciously hate black people. At least I hope they don’t.

I believe that racism exists in the inexplicable sense of fear, unsafety and gnawing anxiety that white people, be they officers with guns or just general folks moving about their lives, have when they encounter black people. I believe racism exists in that sense of mistrust, the extra precautions white people take when they encounter black people. I believe all these emotions have emerged from a lifetime of media consumption subtly communicating that black people are criminal, a lifetime of seeing most people in power look just like you, a lifetime of being the majority population. And I believe this subconscious sense of having lost control (of the universe) exists for white people, at a heightened level since the election of Barack Obama and the continued explosion of the non-white population.

The irony is that black people understand this heightened anxiety. We feel it, too. We study white people. We are taught this as
a tool of survival. We know when there is unrest in the souls of white folks. We know that unrest, if not assuaged quickly, will lead to black death. Our suspicions, unlike those of white people, are proven right time and time again.

I speak to this deep psychology of race, not because I am trying to engage in pop psychology but because we live in a country that is so deeply emotionally dishonest about both race and racism. When will we be honest enough to acknowledge that the police have more power than the ordinary citizen? They are supposed to. And with more power comes more responsibility.

Why are police calling the people of Ferguson animals and yelling at them to “bring it”? Because those officers in their riot gear, with their tear gas and dogs, want a justification for slaughter. But inexplicably in that moment we turn our attention to the rioters, the people with less power, but justifiable anger, and say, “You are the problem.” No. A cop killing an unarmed teenager who had his hands in the air is the problem. Anger is a perfectly reasonable response. So is rage.

We are talking about justifiable outrage. Outrage over the unjust taking of the lives of people who look like us. How dare people preach and condescend to these people and tell them not to loot, not to riot? Yes, those are destructive forms of anger, but frankly I would rather these people take their anger out on property and products rather than on other people.

No, I don’t support looting. But I question a society that always sees the product of the provocation and never the provocation itself. I question a society that values property over black life. But I know that our particular system of law was conceived on the founding premise that black lives are white property. “Possession,” the old adage goes, “is nine-tenths of the law.”

But we are the dispossessed. We cannot count on the law to protect us. We cannot count on police not to shoot us down in cold blood. We cannot count on politics to be a productive outlet for our rage. We cannot count on prayer to soothe our raging, ragged souls.

This is what I mean when I say that we live in a society that is deeply emotionally dishonest about racism. We hear a story each and every week now about how some overzealous officer has killed another black man, or punched or beaten or choked a black woman. This week we heard two stories — Mike Brown in Missouri and John Crawford in Ohio. These are not isolated incidents. How many cops in how many cities have to murder how many black men — assault how many black women — before we recognize that this shit is not isolated? It is systemic from the top to the bottom.

Every week we are having what my friend Dr. Regina Bradley called #anotherhashtagmemorial. Every week. We are weak. We are tired. Of being punching bags and shooting targets for the police. We are tired of well-meaning white citizens and respectable black ones foreclosing all outlets for rage. We are tired of these people telling us what isn’t the answer.

The answer isn’t looting, no. The answer isn’t rioting, no. But the answer also isn’t preaching to black people about “black-on-black” crime without full acknowledgment that most crime is intraracial. The answer is not having a higher standard for the people than for the police. The answer is not demanding that black people get mad about and solve the problem of crime in Chicago before we get mad about the slaughter of a teen boy just outside St. Louis.

We can be, and have been, and are mad about both. Violence is the effect, not the cause of the concentrated poverty that locks that many poor people up together with no conceivable way out and no productive way to channel their rage at having an existence that is adjacent to the American dream. This kind of social mendacity about the way that racism traumatizes black people individually and collectively is a festering sore, an undiagnosed cancer, a raging infection threatening to overtake every organ in our body politic.
We are tired of these people preaching a one-sided gospel of peace. “Turn the other cheek” now means “here are our collective asses to kiss.” We are tired of forgiving people because they most assuredly do know what they do.

Mike Brown is dead. He is dead for no reason. He is dead because a police officer saw a 6-foot-4, 300-plus-pound black kid, and miscalculated the level of threat. To be black in this country is to be subject to routine forms of miscalculated risk each and every day. Black people have every right to be angry as hell about being mistaken for predators when really we are prey. The idea that we would show no rage as we accrete body upon body – Eric Garner, John Crawford, Mike Brown (and those are just our summer season casualties) — is the height of delusion. It betrays a stunning lack of empathy, a stunning refusal of people to grant the fact of black humanity, and in granting our humanity, granting us the right to the full range of emotions that come with being human. Rage must be expressed. If not it will tear you up from the inside out or make you tear other people up. Usually the targets are those in closest proximity. The disproportionate amount of heart disease, cancers, hypertension, obesity, violence and other maladies that plague black people is as much a product of internalized, unrecognized, unaddressed rage as it is anything else.

Nothing makes white people more uncomfortable than black anger. But nothing is more threatening to black people on a systemic level than white anger. It won’t show up in mass killings. It will show up in overpolicing, mass incarceration, the gutting of the social safety net, and the occasional dead black kid. Of late, though, these killings have been far more than occasional. We should sit up and pay attention to where this trail of black bodies leads us. They are a compass pointing us to a raging fire just beneath the surface of our national consciousness. We feel it. We hear it. Our nostrils flare with the smell of it.

James Baldwin called it “the fire next time.” A fire shut up in our bones. A sentient knowledge, a kind of black epistemology, honed for just such a time as this. And with this knowledge, a clarity that says if “we live by the sword, we will die by it.”

Then, black rage emerges prophetic from across the decades in the words of Harlem Renaissance poet Claude McKay who penned these words 95 years ago in response to the Red Summer of 1919.

If we must die, let it not be like hogs
Hunted and penned in an inglorious spot,
While round us bark the mad and hungry dogs
Making their mock at our accursed lot.
If we must die, O let us nobly die,
So that our precious blood may not be shed
In vain; then even the monsters we defy
Shall be constrained to honor us though dead!
O kinsmen! we must meet the common foe!
Though far outnumbered let us show us brave,
And for their thousand blows deal one death-blow!
What though before us lies the open grave?
Like men we'll face the murderous, cowardly pack,
Pressed to the wall, dying, but fighting back!

I offer no answers. I offer only grief and rage and hope.

Brittney Cooper

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Not all of the Black freedom fighters are men  
An Interview with Black Women on the Front line in Ferguson  

October 3, 2014  
By Kristin Braswell  

As we marched from West Florissant to the Ferguson Police Department on that sweltering day in August, a bevy of voices carried through the air like a canon with a very specific target. Two young women armed with a megaphone, climbed on top of a cement wall above the crowd. “If Mike don’t get it, shut it down! If we don’t get it, shut it down!” they screamed. The crowd soon echoed the chant. In front of us, members of the Ferguson Police Department stood in a row, their faces expressionless; their gazes everywhere but nowhere. Regardless, the chants got louder. One man who joined the women above stepped down, chuckled and said, “I guess she got this.” And he was right. She did.

Since the moment Michael Brown was murdered on August 9, women in Ferguson have played a critical role in mobilizing their communities to convict officer Darren Wilson. Like the women of the Civil Rights movement, their strategies, passion and relentless pursuit for justice had not stopped. In fact, it is only getting stronger and more focused, as seen through the recent development of Millennial Activists United. Run by a majority of women, the group remains at the forefront of protests outside of the Ferguson Police Department, city council meetings and Twitter updates. They are recording a part of American history and fighting against a system that has often overlooked young people and Black women in particular. They feed, they clothe, they organize, and they rally. Because of them, there is a tangible movement occurring in Ferguson, one that may one day make the cover of Time magazine too late or never at all. But still, they fight. This is a movement of young people willing to risk their jobs, their degrees and even their lives in the name of freedom. Here are some voices of the women who have been on the ground since day one.

TFW: Who are the members of Millennial Activists and how did the idea to form the group come about?  

Zakiya Jemmott: The members of Millennial Activists United (or MAU) are Brittany Ferrell, Ashley Yates, Zakiya Jemmott, Larry Fellows III, and Alexis Templeton. We are a gifted group of 20 and 30 something year old activists who were brought together by Twitter. We knew that we were passionate about bringing light to the injustices of police brutality in our communities and we dedicated ourselves to sustaining the movement. What began as making sandwiches for protesters and marching every night turned into us becoming street medics after being tear-gassed and shot at. After working together for weeks we realized we needed a name. Today we operate as Millennial Activists United, a youth-led grassroots organization that focuses on educating and empowering our communities.

TFW: What have you learned as women about the way you are perceived in the movement and how do you hope to empower other women?  

Brittany Ferrell: I have never experienced such blatant sexism. I’ve always known for it to exists and I’m aware that at some point have been a victim of it, whether my socially conditioned mind had noticed it or not. But this movement has really put sexism directly in front of me, everyday, and since has built an intolerance within me. As women are the majority in the movement here in St. Louis, it puzzles me as to why we have to make sure we are heard and seen for the work we are doing, rather than just pretty faces. I’ve had to check so many brothers for coming at me as if I’m out here to look pretty and waiting for them to hit on me. One night while out at Ferguson Police Department, a place we frequent at night to ensure things are running smooth, I was walking back to the car and this older man yelled at me “Ay, you, ay, come here. Let me touch your hair. Let me touch your hair.” Now, mind you, he was suppose to be a “protester” yet he is more worried about me and my hair rather than his purpose for being there at that time. That same night I had a brother ask me if my clothing I had on
were my “activist clothing” because I looked way too beautiful to be out there at night.

Johnetta Elzie: While being a part of the protests from start to finish I saw and felt the strength of women. I witnessed the fearless spirits of the people, but there was something special happening. For the first time I had seen a large group of women standing side by side, crying out in anger, sorrow, and pain. Our hurt and pain caused an organic bond to start forming. To go from the streets protesting with women being on the frontline, to inside closed meetings where women are the minority discussing what has happened in Ferguson, I continue to tell the truth of what happened in Ferguson from a female’s perspective. By being involved in private conversations, hopefully it inspires other women who stood on the frontlines to do the same.

Brittney Ferrell: Being that MAU is a majority woman organization, we are committed to defending and taking up for each other, and that is what we do. In both incidents we had each other, and so everyone will know when they see us, we are not here to showcase our pretty faces, so if you aren’t careful with your sexism you will be called on it.

I hope that we as a majority woman organization can empower women to not be afraid to confront all oppression, sexism included. This is a fight way greater than we can imagine but we are fully capable of fight to the end and being heard.

Ashley Yates: The perception of women in the movement is definitely positive. People recognize that women are instrumental in leading this movement and propelled it forward from all fronts: the ground, social media and organizing. However, when it comes to the platforms for the movement, the women have definitely been left behind in a sense. MAU plans on leading the way in carving out a space for women to not only be heard on a larger platform but also creating safe spaces in which the women of Ferguson and greater St Louis can cultivate conversation and generate concrete ways in which we can move forward together in unity: with ourselves and the men of this movement.

Zakiya Jemmott: Gender inclusion is a major issue that we have all faced since our involvement. When we go out to protest or even speak at town hall meetings there is a lack of support from a majority of the men and we are treated as if we’re invisible and haven’t been the most vocal since the movement mobilized. We have reached out to our men and asked them to stand with us and not for us because this is our fight just as much as theirs. Personally I have been chastised by black men that claim they love black women and was even told that I’m only good for twerking by one of these men. He’s a well-known misogynist so I won’t hold that against all of our black men that have been supporting and fighting with us.

TFW: What has the media left out in regard to the important role that Black women have played in Ferguson?

Brittany: The media has left out that if it were not for Black Women, there would be no movement. We have seriously carried this to where it is now, not to say there are no men out here doing their thing because there are. What I am saying is that women have been here since day one, we are willing to lay our lives on the line to keep up the good fight without the support from anyone or any organization, hence why we built our own.

Zakiya: The media is excluding the fact that the police brutality and harassment in our communities impacts the women just as much as the men. They’re highlighting black male lives and pushing the black female lives lost to police violence to the side. I want for the media to understand that ALL black lives matter.

TFW: How have you had to adjust your lives (work schedules, school, etc) in order to commit to this movement?

Brittany: I am a mother and a senior nursing student. My life has been altered tremendously. There have been times when I’ve had my child out during the day to protest because my sitters didn’t
support my involvement in the movement. I’ve had to bring her to meetings with me, with her homework and dinner because I know I wouldn’t make it home in time to cook. I’ve had to meet with my dean to explain to them my involvement in Ferguson and how insensitive I think the university is for not acknowledging the events in Ferguson when it is practically their backyard (University of Missouri St. Louis) and how it directly affects students that look like me! I work from home but I haven’t really been able to put that much work in because I’m so invested in the community. I’ve had a relationship crumble because my experiences have shifted my perspective on feminism and my attitude on resistance and they don’t approve. It’s crazy.

Ashley: (Ha.) Our lives have been on pause since Aug 9th. The formulation of MAU really happened organically, as we looked around and saw who was working day in and day out in Ferguson. As we began to have conversations with each other, we saw the absolute dedication each and every one of us have to making sure this horrific tragedy is transformed into a revolutionary transformation of the system as it stands. For some of us that meant delaying school, others it meant quitting jobs in order to commit fully to fighting for justice.

Zakiya: Personally I postponed my graduate school enrollment date to relocate to St. Louis for graduate school for the following semester. Now that we have founded MAU I want to make sure I’m available.

TFW: Take us back to some of the early moments of protesting after Mike Brown’s murder. How did you all mobilize then?

Brittany: We were out in Ferguson everyday with resistance, marching, and chanting. In between doing those things, we fed protesters that were out, one food round in the morning and one in the evening, to make sure everyone was fed. At night when the tanks, gas and bullets came out, we turned into either raging protesters or medics. Equipped with masks, Maalox and apple cider remedies and other things to treat tear gas exposure. We mobilized in the best ways we knew how early in the protests.

Ashley: Twitter was largely responsible for getting the word out about actions and movements in the first week. That was the way in which almost every one of us got the news that Mike Brown had been murdered and it’s importance in the early days cannot be stressed enough. The day I met Netta and Larry was Monday, Aug 11th. West Florissant and practically all of Ferguson was completely shut down and blocked off by police. Determined to get in and continue to tell our narrative, I followed their actions on Twitter, messaged them about their whereabouts and met up with them at a mutual friend’s house. I didn’t know any of the people that I now call my activist family before this. We didn’t have each other phone numbers, but Twitter made it so that we could connect in the midst of chaos and police attacks and form a community.

TFW: Ferguson has a long history of distrust for law enforcement. Did your opinion on the police force changer after the protests?

Brittany: I had the same views of Ferguson, and St. Louis, before the protests as I do now. The only difference is that now I know they have more equipment than I thought.

Ashley: Entirely. I never had a hatred for the police. Songs like “eff the police” would make me cringe, because of generalization and stereotypes. But what I realized after that first week is that the police have a culture that warrants and actually invites those generalizations. They are a force. Several of them told me on August 10th that they are a fraternity. That reality really hit home when I realized some of those same officers that were so civil during the daylight were pointing rifles at my head during the night and would not hesitate to shoot me upon command. It’s a system based on unwavering trust and support in each other, even when they are obviously wrong. And sadly, it’s that culture of unquestioned authority that pits them against the very communities they are supposed to be “serving”.

Zakiya: I grew up in Bedford-Stuyvesant, Brooklyn, New York. I’ve
reiterated many times that Ferguson’s W. Florissant is comparable to my Nostrand Avenue. My first protest was in 1999, when Amadou Diallo was murdered by police. I haven’t seen any changes and have not changed my perception of police officers.

TFW: I’ve read you refer to your work as part of a “revolution.” Why is a youth led movement integral to this revolution?

Brittany: The youth led movement is an integral part of this revolution because we know that what has been done before will not work now. The dynamics are different. We have identified what is lacking and what is needed for us as a people to move forward in strength. We recognize that if Darren Wilson is not arrested for murdering Mike Brown the city will burn, and we have accepted that. We are unmoved and unafraid. Without us I feel this whole situation would have been swept under the rug by week 2.

Ashley: The youth knew something very early in that the older generation didn’t. We knew that the system had already failed even before they began to show their hand publicly. We knew that not only was the murder of Mike Brown unjustified, it was another example of how the systems in place made it acceptable to gun us down. We are the generation that was ignited by Trayvon Martin’s murder and placed our faith in a justice system that failed us in a very public and intentional manner. Most of us were raised by parents that inherited the fruits of labor from the Civil Rights movement. They were placated, in a sense, by the stories of a reality that no longer seemed an issue for them. So as we navigate a society where those realities of segregation and oppression are supposed to be far behind us, yet are more present than ever before in our lives, we say no more. We are the descendants of those who already fought for these freedoms and we will not let their sacrifices, blood, sweat and tears be swept away. We will cash in on the heavy price they already paid.

Johnetta: The youth leading this movement is important because it is our time. For so long the elders have told us our generation doesn’t fight for anything, or that we don’t care about what goes on in the world. We have proved them wrong. Consciousness has been raised, people are waking up to take a stand against injustice. Thankfully for this generation, instead of waiting for a letter in the mail from Malcolm X, we have social media to drive this movement and get the truth out to millions of people, live.

TFW: What do Millennial Activists hope to accomplish? How can people in STL and out of state get involved?

Ashley: MAU is dedicated to lifting up the community of Ferguson first and foremost. We are committed to complete and utter reform of the systems in place that are clearly designed against us. Political education, community policing, grassroots organizing and on the ground actions are the methods we believe are instrumental in achieving a radical reform that will make the world our children inherit better than the one we came into. People wanting to get involved with us can contact us via twitter @MillennialAU or email us at millennialau@gmail.com

Zakiya: We encourage people to become active in their communities and register to vote. It’s apparent that the local legislators are pivotal in fundamental change in our communities and not just the national legislators. We want our young people to be educated on our political rights and human rights. There are workshops that we teach locally but still encourage anyone to lead discussions on past events and build strategies for the future.

TFW: Beyond the news reports and headlines, what do you want people to know about Ferguson?

Brittany: Ferguson was the catalyst to a movement that involves all Black and Brown people worldwide. We will never stop fighting for justice for US.

Ashley: I would like people to know that Ferguson is just like YOUR town. If people learn one thing from the happenings here, let it be that, if it happened here, it can happen anywhere. MillennialAU is fighting everyday to make sure that is not the case. Join
with us and help us ensure that no other Black names are immortalized through a hashtag like #MikeBrown.

Johnetta: Ferguson is a small community, within St. Louis County. It is a normal neighborhood filled with small businesses, and some major chains too. Nothing like this has happened in Ferguson before. We are truly learning as we go.

Kristin Braswell is a Brooklyn-based journalist and producer by way of Los Angeles. She has contributed to The Huffington Post, Essence, ABC News, NPR, and Ebony, and her writing portfolio includes travel features, film critiques and social analyses. She has also produced short films and commercials. She is especially passionate about education, race and gender equality, as well as the promotion of healthy living and relationships. Her aim is to use writing as a tool to get people to think and to desire positive changes for themselves and their world.