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Afro-Blue Notes: The Death of Afro-pessimism (2.0)?

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Abstract This article examines Wilderson and Sexton’s trending reiteration of an *old* Euro-imperial pessimism – a perverse “Afro-pessimism (2.0)” in which Africa disappears altogether along with most of the Black diaspora. Its fatalist representation of “slavery” is interrogated for its “Americanism” and Occidentalism besides its canonical erasure of Black resistance and Pan-African revolt for white settler state historiographies. Although their academic critique disguises itself as a “Black radical discourse,” it is here interrogated vis-à-vis actual traditions of Black radical praxis which it typically disregards (e.g., C.A. Diop; Césaire; Sylvia Wynter) or distorts (e.g., Fanon; Assata; the “BLA”). The article closes with an analysis of Wilderson’s simply shocking distortion of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, a novel of the liveliest *maroonage*.

I can’t be a pessimist. Because I’m alive.

To be a pessimist means that you have agreed that human life is an academic matter.

James Baldwin¹

I despair at our failure to wrest power from those who have it and abuse it; our reluctance to reclaim our old powers lying dormant with neglect; our hesitancy to create new power in areas where it never before existed; and I’m euphoric because everything in our history, our spirit, our daily genius – suggests we do it.

Toni Cade Bambara²

They’ve been “killing all the niggers” for nearly half a millennium now, but I am still alive. I might be the most resilient dead man in the universe. The upsetting thing is that they never take into consideration the fact that I am going to resist.

George Jackson³

Death, you are ugly, you are white. Death, you are death no more. ...I’ve killed fear and my soul’s on fire. I confess I am armed and prepared to reproduce the love that made me live. ...This beautiful, beautiful woman.

Jayne Cortez⁴

Introduction

The first item on the bibliography that appears on the “Afro-Pessimism” page of Frank B. Wilderson III’s website is a novel by Ayi Kwei Armah: *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* (1968). The fact is ironic yet far from surprising. There’s much more Armah to read, of course, if many in the West hear of only one or two of his earliest fictional offerings. Who could imagine *The Healers* (1979) in this context? How might *Why Are We So Blessed?* (1972) make an analytical disturbance after *Fragments* (1970) here? Both *Osiris Rising* (1995) and *KMT: The House of Life* (2002) help construct a counter-explanation of this listing, like Armah’s stunning collection of critical non-fiction, *The Eloquence of the Scribes: A Memoir on the Sources and Resources of African Literature* (2006). The very titles of each one of these texts works to repel an academic discursive universe defined by “pessimism.” The body of the texts do so all the more—with an explosive and expansive vision—even though an ever-increasing number of scholars fail to make it there to completion. Decades ago, an established school of criticism began to embrace *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* on basically “pessimistic” terms. This is how it could one day make it to Incognegro.org. Although Armah had soon embarrassed such a reading in a subsequent novel, *Two Thousand Seasons* (1973), he would later revisit the politics of such interpretations most explicitly in “Who Are the Beautiful Ones?”—a new preface written for the PER ANKH edition of his first novel and now republished in a second collection of critical nonfiction, *Remembering the Dismembered Continent: Seedtime Essays* (2010).

Simply put, Armah was never a new African novelist of despair and hopelessness, or pessimism, despite that quick acclaim accorded him by the Western literary establishment. Still, by 2008, he was surprised to find no critical discussion of the central image, concept, or theme of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*: Osiris is “the Beautiful One” in Ancient Egyptian culture for which “beauty” balances moral and intellectual as well as physical dimensions. “The Beautiful One” is his praise name and a cultural-conceptual phrase over five thousand years old. The author took to this specific mythic icon for a classic and prescient anti-colonial Black art-text of the time. The “dismembered and remembered” Osiris is described as a “sorrowful reminder of our human vulnerability to division, fragmentation, and degeneration, and at the same time a symbol of our equally human capacity for unity, cooperative action, and creative regeneration.”⁵ This is hardly pessimism; it is pessimism’s antithesis, if it’d know anything of pessimism at all. For this Osiran sensibility, an African regeneration is certainly to come; and Armah would conclude: “I have yet to come across an earlier, or more attractive image for the urge to positive social change.”⁶

The disappointment of the coup against Kwame Nkrumah's globally symbolic government in Ghana did not signify a "pervasive negativity of the human condition of Africa" for *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The framework narrated through Egypt and Osiris condemned neo-colonialism – and neo-slavery – for a future of further struggle and ultimate, pan-African victory. Africa and Africans bear no naturally condemned status in this world. That is age-old propaganda taking new guises in the present. The elite "decision to adopt the European colonial economic and social model instead of creating an African model" was condemned by Armah along with "the leader's acceptance of the colonial governor's suggestion that he move into the slaveraiders' castle as his new seat of popular power."⁷ This was a matter of "degeneration pushing back the promise of regeneration."⁸ But, predictably, standard literary and other social commentary would fetishize "decay, corruption, loss of integrity and death of dreams" – without the ancient indigenous framework of history and possibility or posterity. It would do so in a fashion that naturalizes the wretched notion of African condemnation, implicitly or explicitly; and it would in effect re-title the novel by effacing the "yet" in *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*. The "birth of a new African society" was delayed, "only postponed, not abrogated."⁹ For the new literary audience of PER ANKH, "the African Publishing Cooperative," Armah even frames the work of his novel as a kind of "foreplay" in the collective work of liberation and regeneration.¹⁰ And its "shades of delight" should be "rich as night" in the words of Oscar Brown's lyrics for John Coltrane and Mongo Santamaría's "Afro-Blue" (1959). Whether theoretically "Afro" or not, a paradigm of pessimism must ignore or repress such a non-European worldview in order to seize and consume *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* as one of its bibliographical texts in the traditional mode of white Western imperialism.

Africa and the Pessimism without History

Reading what some are today calling "Afro-pessimism" invites no small amount of amnesia, myopia, as well as illiteracy. There is little if any Africa to this discourse at all, its nominal Afro-hyphenation notwithstanding. Armah sits atop the lengthy bibliography on the "Afro-Pessimism" page at Incognegro.org for alphabetical reasons alone. The selection of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* is as symptomatic as this list's addition of an Achille Mbembe book in due course. There is Frantz Fanon but only his *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) is included to the exclusion of *A Dying Colonialism* (1959), *The Wretched of the Earth* (1961), and *Toward the African Revolution* (1964). The rest of the bibliography tends to dovetail with "race" and "critical theory" canons of US-centered academic classrooms, graduate if not undergraduate, across North America – with key duty-free imports from Western

Europe. In any case, what is the significance of this term as a term, its rather bizarre adoption by Black academic advocates who have come to promote it today without any apparent sense of the history of its ravaging the African continent and without any reference whatsoever to the history of insistent Black political-intellectual resistance to its application to Africans on the continent and in the diaspora?

Crucially, neither pessimism nor optimism is just a word in a dictionary. Fred Moten made a certain call for “optimism” in an earlier, and terribly “friendly,” response to this “Afro-pessimism” which could be deflected by Jared Sexton as if optimism and pessimism were now virtually transposable conceptual terminology or as if pessimism could suddenly be posed as a strange mode of optimism itself – something like a philosophical detour to it, after all, when all is said and done.¹¹ That’s a specious revision to be sure. Yet what goes ignored here is how this lexical couplet makes its meaning in context, politically, in time and space, particularly in European languages and colonial-imperial lexicons, most notably perhaps in English as well as French, just for example. It carries baggage too big to check in current games of academic branding. What’s more, optimism and pessimism do not ever confront each other on equal ground here, any façade of even-handedness as opposed to hierarchical dichotomy aside. The pessimist intellectual empire of the West has systematically crowded optimism out of serious contemplation and come to pin pessimist condemnation to all “things” Black-African in the interests of white racist imperialism, for various and sundry periods of this empire. Who would overlook this issue rather than address it frontally – in and beyond books of all kinds?

A history or genealogy of optimism and pessimism as “ideologies” is hardly unavailable to us. The old Black radicalism of Cheikh Anta Diop wrote famously and at length about this subject. *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (1959) concluded in the late 1950s, no less: “the Meridional Cradle, confined to the African continent in particular, is characterized by the matriarchal family, the creation of the territorial state, in contrast to the Aryan city-state, the emancipation of woman in domestic life, xenophilia, cosmopolitanism, a sort of social collectivism having as a corollary a tranquility going as far as unconcern for tomorrow, a material solidarity of right for each individual...” “In the moral domain,” he continues, “it shows an ideal of peace, of justice, of goodness and an optimism which eliminates all notion of guilt or original sin in religious and metaphysical institutions.”¹² Looking at literature in a long world history, Diop analyzed novels, tales, fables, and comedies to advance this core proposition, along with the material and economic structures of human social development. His Pan-African critique of European imperialism indicted not only its culture of “war, violence, crime, and conquests,” but also its signature “metaphysical systems” of pessimism.¹³ One could thus combat “anti-Black” racism, “anti-Black” colonialism, and “anti-Black” imperialism, so to speak,

by confronting or challenging the pessimism of Occidentalism—or one could reproduce this “anti-Black” empire of slavery and colonialism by adopting, reifying, and endorsing it. The final words of *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* would proclaim in the spirit of revolutionary decolonization and bona fide independence: “The universe of tomorrow will in all probability be imbued with African optimism.”¹⁴

How then does a current trend in academia proceed to dub itself “Afro-pessimism,” simultaneously deeming itself a school of Black radical thinking, with no awareness of a critique of this stature; no engagement with it at all; and no critical explanation of how “Afro-pessimism” could not as a consequence signify an elemental contradiction in terms? The late Diop remains the most monumental historian of the Black world. His intellectual biography is as legendary as his academic and extra-academic scholarship. It is almost cliché now to recall that he was named the most influential thinker of the 20th century—with W.E.B. DuBois—at the First World Festival of Black Arts convened in Dakar of the 1960s. Even if Anglophone political and intellectual circles show little awareness of his radical political practice and related political imprisonment as opposition under Leopold Senghor in neo-colonial Senegal—thinking too exclusively of his counter to Egyptology or his anti-Hellenomania—Diop was and is no less a giant for the historic Black Studies movement of the African diaspora across the Americas.¹⁵

Ifi Amadiume would revisit these aspects of Diop’s thought with dazzling ingenuity in her introduction to the Karnak House publication of *L’unité culturelle de l’Afrique noire: domaines du patriarcat et du matriarcat dans l’antiquité classique* in English translation. She endorses without pause his “vision” of an African optimism and identifies him as a Black-African precursor of the white ecology movement, the “Greens.”¹⁶ Her own groundbreaking work as in *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion and Culture* (1997) makes a massive critique of European sexual and gender imperialism, systemically exposing assorted feminisms as Occidentalism as a rule, politically and epistemologically. Both world historiography and global political theory remain sites of intervention for her too. Overall, she highlights a critique of what could be dubbed a *racial patriarchy* conceived by Diop’s corpus that is comparable to Cedric J. Robinson’s critique of “racial capitalism” in *Black Marxism: The Making of the Black Radical Tradition* (1983). In opposition to imperialism, it could also oppose the romance language of “feminism” as the exclusive and compulsory language for any systemic “anti-sexism” or opposition to “patriarchy” or male dominance. At any rate, Amadiume’s Black radicalism does not “forget” the anti-pessimism or age-old Afro-optimism embedded in Cheikh Anta Diop’s classic anti-racism, anti-colonialism, and anti-imperialism of the Black world.

The total ignorance of these traditions manifested by the new incarnation of “Afro-pessimism” might be alarming enough, but what may be more so is its studied ignorance of the racist discourse of “Afro-pessimism” that preceded it and which gives it a name, a sensibility and an orientation. The original Afro-pessimism functioned like a sociological “culture of poverty” or “culture of pathology” discourse not for Black ghettos in the diaspora but for the entire African continent (and, by extension, the diaspora) with a tacit historical and environmental determinism as opposed to the ecological and politically militant African optimism of Diop, Amadiume, and others. This is the Afro-pessimism that has been so diffuse in popular media and all the Western academic disciplines which ever fix upon Africa that it may be impossible to write an exact or exhaustive history of it. What Trinh T. Minh-ha once said about the anthropological version of the “human sciences” can easily be said about this recently recycled Afro-pessimism; it functions as “the foundation of every single discourse pronounced above the native’s head,” whenever that “native” is an African in Western discourse on Africa and Africans anywhere.¹⁷

So, in 2010, Gloria Emeagwali of the History Department at Central Connecticut University offered an online broadside against “Afro-pessimism” grounded in history, realism, and critical hilarity. She cut straight to the point: “There are about six types of Afro-pessimists.” They might be schematized as follows:

- Category A:* the Nihilists
- Category B:* the Haters and Abominable Racists
- Category C:* the Scholars of Hopelessness
- Category D:* the Self-Loathers
- Category E:* the Opportunist Career-Seekers
- Category F:* the Poverty Pornographers.¹⁸

Of the first category, she writes: “Their negative and nihilistic views still permeate a lot of texts on history, geography, sociology, etc. Just pay a visit to the textbooks and read between and above the lines.” The second category’s vocabulary “is limited to words like barbarism, savage, tribesmen, uncivilized and so on. Let us say that you can spot them from a mile away. They are less sophisticated than Group A.... The cult of whiteness permeates their thought process, theological icons and symbols.” The third category of scholars may be “genuinely disappointed with the pace of change in post-colonial Africa,” and can conduct some otherwise correct analysis, but “their discourse is largely counter-inspirational, when unmatched with real political activity and engagement on the ground.” More pointedly, and tragically, they lack all confidence to have hope in anything. The fourth category of Afro-pessimist hates “the skin they’re in” as “victims of white suprem-

acist propaganda, assimilated from the neo-colonial mass media, textbooks, religious texts, Hollywood movies and literature[,] etc.” They are bemoaned as “self-destructive parodies of themselves.” The fifth category doesn’t even believe what they say while they pander for fame and fortune in the white public spheres of the West: “The more they pathologize Africa, the more likely their promotion to the next level in the context of institutionalized racism. They thrive on pity and are beneficiaries of the ‘mercy-industrial complex’ in one way or the other.” The sixth category seems to delight in tales and images of Black misery and *suffering*. This type especially embodies a blatant “First Worldism” by default: “Celebrities in search of attention, and politicians with little to offer their constituency at home, may fall into this category. Some are humanitarian opportunists – although there are a few well-meaning exceptions, with less questionable motives.” Then, Emeagwali observes, “there are the flip floppers ... occasionally trapped between the old paradigm and a newly emerging one.”¹⁹ No doubt, other critics might tweak the details of this profile in one way or another. But it’d be inaccurate to dub Emeagwali’s electronic broadside a “parody,” or a “caricature,” since it was so decisively on the mark for so many: “Afro-pessimists” of diverse stripes had been asking for this kind of treatment for how long? Their colonial cultural pathology had been doing its racist colonial work for so long that Diop’s scholarship was a clear response to it and had been hard pressed to dismantle it since the middle of the last millennium.

Regarding “Afro-pessimism” (2.0)

How in the world – or “America” – does this become “Black” and trendy? The comment on “flip-flopping” between the old and new turns out to have been foreboding. A very different cyber-statement was found at Incognegro.org, where “Afro-pessimism” is on the menu but there is not a referential hint of what Emeagwali or her Pan-African or Africanist audience would have in mind with their long-held contempt for the terminology and the metaphysical ideology embedded in it. The largest presence in the Wilderson bibliography is Saidiya V. Hartman, whose *Lose Your Mother* memoir can be read as custom-made for multiple components of Emeagwali’s anti-pessimist critique or as orthodox *Euro-pessimism* in and for an objectified African continent and population.²⁰ When Emeagwali envisions an old paradigm changing into newly emerging ones, she might have been sensing the afterlife and cyberlife of the white Western, “anti-Black,” colonial-imperialist idiom of “Afro-pessimism” to be renovated or reincarnated with new faces and in new places. She seemed to predict future or sense incipient machinations of the old in a new cosmetic guise – like “Empire” under “Obama.”

On *Red, White & Black* and “Redemption”

Recently, putative foundations get presented or re-presented: Frank Wilderson publishes “Afro-Pessimism & the End of Redemption” (2016) in *The Occupied Times* after *Incognegro: A Memoir of and Apartheid* (2008) and *Red, White and Black: Cinema and the Structures of US Antagonism* (2010). The history of the vexing concept mocked by countless African scholars and politicians will go either unknown or unrecognized or both somehow in this latest articulation nonetheless. Some incubation period seems to have given this “Afro-pessimism” a very odd new breed of life. Intellectually, it is presented as a “new” brand, still, somehow – in an academic discourse on slavery, but a brand that can’t possibly be “new” at all of course. Copyright issues of capitalism notwithstanding, this is a kind of “Afro-pessimism (2.0)” – *kind of*. It is very much of the old while effecting some great and deliberate ignorance of that which shapes and informs it. The global-conservative racist colonial-imperialist matrix of the “old” is simply disregarded by the “new” in its *re-branding* for the contemporary academic marketplace. Hence, Wilderson writes, “Afro-pessimism argues that the regime of violence that subsumes Black bodies is different from the regime of violence that subsumes hyper-exploited colonial subalterns, exploited workers and other oppressed peoples.”²¹ He reprises, “Let me state the proposition differently: Human Life is dependent on Black death for its existence and for its conceptual coherence. There is no World without Blacks, yet there are no Blacks who are in the World. The Black is indeed a sentient being, but the constriction of Humanist thought is a constitutive disavowal of Blackness as social death; a disavowal that theorises [*sic*] the Black as degraded human entity: i.e., as an oppressed worker, a vanquished postcolonial subaltern, or a non-Black woman suffering under the disciplinary regime of patriarchy.”²² What can be said of these “foundations,” as it were, conventionally or unconventionally speaking?

First of all, how is it that “Afro-pessimism argues,” in point of fact? How does it become such a *personified* abstraction bestowed with such a rhetorical aura of authority, begging so many questions as to the perverse circumstances of its hypothetical birth, or rebirth? Furthermore, how does this arguing “Afro-pessimism” get to have such authoritative “life” – as a “field”; to be a living, speaking thing, not a theory even but an oracular “Theorist” – when Black people as a people (or “sentient beings”) are rendered as nothing but “dead” by this Afro-pessimism’s absolute commitment to the concept of “social death” for Black people on the white plantations of African enslavement and after the formal demise of those plantations still?

It’s imperative to analyze this specific discourse (or notion) of “slavery” embedded here along with the conception of history or the geopol-

itics of history inscribed by a “Black” discourse that could so casually dub itself “Afro-pessimism.” The entire discourse operates in the flow of an exceptionally provincial time and place. The “First Worldism” noted in *Afro-pessimism (1.0)* by Emeagwali is matched here by what Malcolm X marvelously defied as “Americanism.” A “new,” “pessimist” critique of “anti-Black racism” is made in the age and academic context of liberal identity conflicts and competitions—“after the revolution has failed,” to recall George L. Jackson, after counter-revolution has receded an array of revolutionary movements of praxis from hegemonic and certainly academic view. Wilderson adds in his writing against redemption: “We need to apprehend the profound and irreconcilable difference between White supremacy (the *colonial utility* of the Sand Creek massacre) and anti-Blackness (the human race’s *necessity* for violence against Black people). The antagonism between the post-colonial subject and the settler (the Sand Creek massacre, or the Palestinian Nakba) cannot—and should not be—analogized with the violence of social death: that is the violence of slavery, which did not end in 1865, for the simple reason that slavery did not end in 1865.”²³ The chronological marker of “1865” is not insignificant or inconsequential. It indexes a specific white settler nationalist project; the USA construct of “Americanism” (or “amerikanism”) and slaveocracy; an official, white settler-slave state nationalist history and historiography. Yet Blackness and slavery are supposedly being thought at the most global or worldly level of humanity and humanism. Yet species automatically becomes nation, or the settler nation-state ideal, “American” meaning US settler imperialism in North America—both the species of humanity and the species of Blackness, which is cut up, constricted, and undercut from the start by Wilderson’s paradigm.

How should 1865 function for the London site of *The Occupied Times*?²⁴ The powder-keg Haitian Revolution does not pivot around 1865, of course, but 1791–1804. Britain declared a “gradual” abolition of slavery in 1833–34 with a typical “compensation” mandated for the slavers. So, what of the official if spurious “emancipation” dates for the rest of the Black world of Africa’s enslaved diaspora? Spain is said to officially abolish slavery in 1811, for instance, while making exceptions for colonies in Cuba, Santo Domingo, and Puerto Rico. Denmark proclaims abolition in its “West Indies” in 1846–1848, like Sweden for Barthélemy in 1847. France is forced to follow suit, once more, in 1848; and Gabon is “founded” accordingly in Africa as the US would Liberia, etc. “Upper Canada” was said to end slavery with the British and “Lower Canada” (now Québec) with the French, an interesting fact for narrations of the Underground Railroad that often kept moving beyond Canada in the north back to the African continent (often Sierra Leone). The Netherlands is said to do so in 1861 or 1863. The modern slavery founded in the “Hispano-Portuguese slave trade” would thrive

in the Western Hemisphere both before and after formal independence from Spain and Portugal. This is key to debunk the “Afro-pessimism” that thinks it can delink slavery and colonialism as two separate, even competing entities or issues. The *criollo* settler-colonial slave-states of Cuba and Brazil do not officially abolish slavery for Africans until two decades after 1865 in 1886 and 1888, respectively. Slavery was purportedly abolished in Ecuador in 1851, but it is quite possible to move that pretentious date to 1894, which is well beyond the official “closing” dates widely touted for Brazil after Puerto Rico and Cuba in the Americas. To think of slavery’s pseudo-abolition in terms of 1865 alone or any one date is not to think on the level of “Blackness” and “Human Life” at all; it is to reinscribe the most imperial white “American” perspective on slavery and Blackness instead.

The conceptual-geopolitical trappings of “1865” fundamentally define the discourse of “Afro-Pessimism and the Ends of Redemption,” like assorted neo-pessimist texts: “The expanding field of Afro-pessimism theorises [*sic*] the structural relation between Blackness and Humanity as an irreconcilable encounter, an antagonism. One cannot know Blackness as distinct from slavery, for there is no Black temporality which is antecedent to the temporality of the Black slave.”²⁵ Critically, Wole Soyinka details “pre-colonial” African languages of “black” self-identification from the Yoruba to the Ga to the Hausa peoples on continent, for starters, in “The African World and the Ethnocultural Debate” (1989). But these details do not enter modern Eurocentric discussions in the main, be they Marxist or anti-Marxist, etc.²⁶ There is in Wilderson only the slaver’s history of slavery — *one* slaver’s official “national” or state history and discourse. The “expanding field” of “Afro-pessimism” (2.0) further expands anti-Black, anti-African conceptions of historical agency. There is nothing outside of, or before, or countering Wilderson’s “slavery” for the African enslaved. There is only Wilderson’s “Blackness,” which is curious. For what he casts as “Black” rather than “black” is more accurately cast as “negro” (in this specifically English usage, moreover, with no memory of the Spanish or Portuguese etymology) and not even “Negro,” quiet as it’s kept — since all of Africa is flatly foreclosed by this acutely paradoxical “Afro-pessimism.” Both Africa and *diasporas* eclipsed, his “Blackness” and “Human Life” turn out to be the blackness and humanism of white Americanism, specifically and restrictively, an isolationist or exceptionalist Americanism despite the past and present hegemony of white Western humanism and its “anti-Black racism” worldwide. What is the “Afro” in “Afro-pessimism,” therefore, when this Afro-pessimism (2.0) revivifies in disguise the “negro” concept of white settler-slave state history and historiography? It ironically does so in the name of some “Blackness” itself or, rather, the “blackness” of whiteness, of white postulation — not the Blackness of Blackness or the transvalua-

tions of manifold Black liberation movements themselves, even as it blithely misappropriates the ongoing if now naturalized cultural-political labor of that historic Blackness in the upper case. A dominant Anglo-American discourse of slavery is all that there is and ever was now when it comes to the Black and African, all anti-slavery discourses and counter-discourses of slavery as well as Blackness somehow vanished.

A glaring absence of Black radical and revolutionary intellectual history should be expected from any expression of “Afro-pessimism.” Indeed, could Afro-pessimism 2.0 take hold as another trend in mainstream academia except in the political void produced after the 1960s and ‘70s by local as well as global counter-revolution and counter-insurgency? This absence affects the shape and agenda of the critical analysis of “anti-Black racism” in essential ways. Wilderson’s critique of the “ruse of analogy” in *Red, White & Black* becomes a refrain that naturalizes academic approaches to politics now institutionalized with the continued reign of Western bourgeois liberalism. For older and enduring Black radical perspectives, the existence of “anti-Black racism” among non-Black peoples, organizations, and movements is neither a new nor shocking phenomenon. For many Black revolutionary movement logics of the ‘60s and ‘70s, for instance, this did not preclude alliance (or the exhaustion of alliances made) or lead to a doctrinaire rejection of “solidarity” work and its international (or “intercommunal”) possibilities.²⁷ “Contradictions” were expected, so to speak, in theory and practice, which might be resolved or not, depending on material interest, circumstance, etc. For them, this work was not about gauging identity, or the perfection of a projected analogy, but mobilization for the political accomplishments of revolution—a revolutionism that could or may not work toward the development of a new humanism not white or racist or anti-Black after all. The reach for potential solidarities was not construed as a gift or an act of good-willed benevolence, wise or unwise given the risks. Even solidarity work with obviously problematic, openly enemy forces could be a strategic or tactical mode of advancing Black collective self-interests that might dispense with any alliance at any given moment in time without seeing the relationship as a statement of some total identity or non-identity of condition and interests. The notion of solidarity has nowadays been superficialized, remaining riveted on mere rhetorical proclamation and aesthetic or representational identification in neo-colonial culture industries here and there. An older, praxical approach to alliance, perhaps “analogy,” and solidarity is not taken up by current analyses of identity conflicts that prevail with the resurgence of a more academic political-intellectualism and a now much less contested liberalism. This is imperial “multiculturalism” and its malcontents. As much as Afro-pessimism (2.0) may object to certain instances of liberalism, or

regulation white racist liberalism at least, it assumes these Western epistemic frameworks of white academic liberalism all the same, thereby ensconcing the colonialism and neo-colonialism it constantly and symptomatically denegates in text after text.

Black anti-colonialism / anti-colonialist Blackness

The great anti-colonialist poet of *Négritude*, Aimé Césaire wrote famously in his letter of resignation from the French Communist Party that he wanted Marxism and communism to be placed in the service of Black peoples and not Black peoples in the service of Marxism or communism. He maintained in 1956: “it is clear that our struggle—the struggle of colonial peoples against colonialism, the struggle of peoples of color against racism—is more complex, or better yet, of a completely different nature than the fight of the French worker against French capitalism, and it cannot in any way be considered a part, a fragment, of that struggle.”²⁸ As always, he was writing on behalf of Black people who were, proverbially, the only people on the planet who have been excluded from the “human race” by the “modern” history of Western racism and colonialism which obstructs “a true humanism—a humanism made to the measure of the world.”²⁹ What is this *Négritude* if not Blackness, Black anti-colonialism, or anti-colonial Blackness?

This tradition is not a tradition in Wilderson who regularly critiques the analogical arrogance of Marxism, feminism, and an academic paradigm of “post-colonialism” with less common reference to “queer” or “gay and lesbian” categories of analysis as well—all in the name of pessimism. For him, none of these political frameworks with their privileged identarian subjects can capture the condition of “Blackness” and “slavery” (or “the Black/Slave”). While that perspective can allow for some insights—ones certainly seen before around the Black world *and* ones certainly avoided by so much institutional scholarship—it leaves the general categorical grid of established Western political epistemologies intact. The familiar academic terrain of “race, gender, class, and sexuality” frames the critique for “Blackness” of “gender, class, and sexuality” in addition to “post-coloniality” or “post-colonialism.” The most conventional US academic categories of identity and analysis are still rendered in full as discrete, monolithic, and monological categories and referents (e.g., workers, women, etc.), like the respective political ideologies based upon them in the traditional ideological history of the white West (e.g., Marxism, feminism, etc.). There are “workers” and then there are “women,” generically, and then sometimes there are “gays” by whatever name, not to mention “natives” or the colonized in this culturally specific epistemology of a specific culture of colonialism itself. The upshot is quite conservative, even anachronistically so. This critique is an internal if damning critique embodying and encouraging

pessimism largely from within the established order of knowledge that it analytically engages and categorically replenishes and preserves.

The grid politics of Wilderson's critique of "the ruse of analogy" leaves all manner of "Blackness" in a wasteland. The routine categorical contrast with "Native Americans" reduces all that and any colonial condition to a startlingly oversimplified matter of "land" (or "land restoration"); and it occludes "Afro-Indian" history as well as "Red-Black" *maroonage* all across the Americas. The constant generic contrast with "feminism" or "non-Black women" eclipses the more mammoth criticism of "gender" writ large in Diop and Amadiume's Black-African studies of Europe or "Western Civilization" as a "racial patriarchy" of pessimism and "anti-Black" imperialism. The contrast with Marxism and its "workers" never resurrects any issues of "class" or economics from any other perspective to recognize or to resist, for example, the white invention of Black elites as vital instruments of racism, anti-Blackness, and white-supremacism. There never appears a trace of any critique of Black "social class" (or political class) elitism in "Afro-pessimism" (2.0), which is a tell-tale sign of petty-bourgeois or "lumpen-bourgeois" articulations. Lastly, Wilderson's occasional categorical contrast of "Blackness" with Palestinians or *al-Nakba* (which aligns in Arabic with the Swahili substitution for the term "Middle Passage"—*Maafa*, the "Catastrophe") comprehends no Blackness in Palestine or among Palestinians. His Afro-pessimism can envision no Afro-Palestinianism, unlike a great tradition of Pan-African discourses that also do not dislocate Palestine from an anti-colonialist mapping of the African continent or the Afro-Asian landmass of a Pan-Africanist and "Bandung" imagination, one powerfully shared by Malcolm X and Faye A. Sayegh. For "Black Power" internationally, Kwame Ture would refer to Palestine as the "tip of Africa" and uphold Fatima Bernawi, the iconic Black woman who's been named the "first Palestinian female political prisoner," as the paragon of "Black and Palestinian Revolutions."³⁰ She is likewise canonized by other Afro-Palestinian icons themselves, such as Ali Jiddeh and Mahmoud Jiddeh of the African community of the Old City of Jerusalem, for example—or, say, Ahmad and Jumaa Takrouri of Occupied Jericho—who are each among the greatest of all icons across Historic Palestine, a country which has produced multiple Black Panther formations in Hebrew as well as Arabic in the 1970s and the 1980s. Again, Wilderson tacitly "nationalizes" his category of "Blackness" although this is scarcely in the interests of Black people in or outside of the US colonized mainland of Americanism; and so none of the above "Blackness" survives the critical grid of a very *Anglo-American* (and *white* racist state-bound) critique of "analogy," regardless of the "Afro-pessimist" text at hand.

Do not the vulgar colonial-nativist politics of *Incognegro's* strangely overlooked comment on "West Indians" go full blown then in *Red, White & Black* and elsewhere?³¹

There is here a general critical erasure of the massive tradition of *Black anti-colonialism*—or *anti-colonial Black resistance to “anti-Blackness” and anti-Black colonialism*, which transcends nationalization. Wilderson’s “Afro-pessimist” rejects the anti-colonialist paradigms of supposedly “other” peoples, and yet in a manner that reinstates US or Western coloniality nonetheless—a white colonialism that oppresses “the Black” inside and outside the United States’s official geopolitical limits. This position can thus make a virtue out of automatic and absolute anti-alliance postures with no further, actual political action then required for Black people, “the Black critic,” or any Black liberation struggle on this view. Such chauvinism without political commitment or engagement beyond critique is logically consistent, for pessimism, where mere resentment or *ressentiment* can masquerade as resistance or “pro-Black” “radicalism.” After all, Afro-pessimism (2.0) begins with a proud suspicion of Black liberation or Black liberation movement, itself, no less than of its potentially “anti-racist” or “anti-Black” political alliances. This provincial “American” pessimism reveals more affinities with *Créolite* in the Caribbean than Césaire’s anti-colonialist eruption of Pan-African *Négritude*, in reality, its narrowly and negatively delimited rhetoric of the “Blackness” of “the Black” (as “Slave,” of course) notwithstanding. As if this too is a virtue, pessimism is not just suspicious of power but possibility—while, upholding dystopia, it is casually dismissive of all historical actuality that does not support a pessimist paradigm, orientation or sensibility. Analytically, moreover, there is somehow no white colonialism for Blacks to fight in Africa or Black countries of Black people anywhere and no terrible landlessness that afflicts the African diasporas of Blackness captive within white settler and/or imperial state formations, for Wilderson and Afro-pessimism (2.0).

The pessimist rejection of anti-colonialism goes particularly awry with Fanon. The institution of academia came to Fanon late with great selectivity. It isolates him from the whole tradition of Black anti-colonialism (or anti-colonialist Blackness) so that he becomes a cipher, a sort of color-blinding Rorschach test even. In fact, Fanon is isolated from himself. The Fanon taken up like a weapon by the Black liberation movement of the 1960s and ‘70s with the “African Revolution” at large was a militant practitioner and is the author of an extant four-volume body of work recently even collected in the form of a hefty *oeuvre complète* by French as well as Arabic world publishers (i.e., La Découverte and Al Hibr). The Fanon examined in academia got reduced to a very few pages of *Black Skin, White Masks*, which was written when Fanon still thought he could be “French” and faithful to French colonial empire while opposing physiognomic but not cultural or “civilizational” racism. That text of the middle-class *assimilé* is of two minds—ambivalent with its currents of brilliance. Yet this

Fanon becomes “post-colonialist” for US academia when truthfully he becomes “anti-colonialist” and only later both in battle and in the related texts likewise disregarded by Afro-pessimism (2.0): Wilderson privileges the colonized Fanon rather than *A Dying Colonialism* and *Toward the African Revolution* as well as *The Wretched of the Earth*.

The standard suppression of *The Wretched of the Earth* cannot succeed in *Red, White & Black*. Wilderson tries to dichotomize Fanon so that *Black Skin, White Masks* (1952) is cast as a text about “race” and “slavery,” and thereby “Blackness”: *The Wretched of the Earth* is by contrast cast as a “post-colonial’s” text primarily about “land restoration,” or “settler colonialism,” as if they can be cast apart from “Blackness” and Black struggles.³² This is a false dichotomy. Fanon’s corpus does not yield this schism. It should go without saying that *Black Skin, White Masks* is itself a text of colonialism. It is often and falsely read as an exclusively “Caribbean” text, inapplicable to Afro-North America or even non-French colonies in the Caribbean, despite its central references to Chester Himes and Richard Wright as well as “Brer Rabbit” folklore; and even though this Fanon had written, “I come back to one fact: *Wherever he goes, the Negro remains a Negro.*”³³ *The Wretched of the Earth* is often and falsely read as an exclusively “Algerian” text, inapplicable to North America, despite its numerous references to “niggers” as well as Négritude or “Negro-African” culture — *Blackness*, especially for the Second Congress of Black Writers and Artists in Rome; despite its global “Third World” politics; and despite Fanon’s aggressively militant Pan-Africanism. It remains easy for some to ignore Fanon’s insistent categorization of the Algerian revolution as an African revolution as well as how “anti-Black racism” along with anti-Black slavery has lived on the African continent, not exclusively in Africa’s Black diaspora. Curiously, Wilderson’s *Incognegro* would expose the counter-insurgent canonization of *Black Skin, White Masks* in certain quarters, thanks to his youthful contact with the Black Panther Party, which did not dichotomize Blackness or anti-Blackness and colonialism or anti-colonialism in its own revolutionary Fanonism. It trafficked mostly in *Les damnés de la terre*: “...my father had caught me with it last night and beat the living daylights out of me—so I knew it must be good. That had never happened with *Invisible Man*. Then, using one of my old cocktail party gimmicks, I quoted a passage of Fanon from memory: ‘From birth, I began,’ it is clear to him that this narrow world, strewn with prohibition, can only be called into question by absolute violence.’ I told Darnell that for some strange reason that had made me think about Kenwood, but why, I didn’t know; nor did I know why my father had beaten me when Fanon’s other book, *Black Skin, White Masks*, was nestled on his bookshelf beside the works of Sigmund Freud” (Wilderson 2008, 247).³⁴ While Sexton counts the sum total of references to “Fanon” in *Red, White & Black*, as if this datum

alone should impress critical audiences, his tabulation begs the question of which Fanon is referenced and how in a manner all too faithful to the white academic management of Fanon and Fanonism as a crisis to be contained by whatever means:³⁵ *Red, White & Black* seeks to quarantine *The Wretched of the Earth* from Kenwood or Minnesota, and all settler sites of US colonialism, conceding it away from “Blackness” in an ongoing quarrel with Native American, post-colonialist, and sometimes Palestinian “analogy,” even though Wilderson needs to mine its rhetoric at key moments—to speak of putting the enemy “out of the picture” and bringing about “the end of the world” via “absolute violence,” for example, when narratively these words then become the words of “Fanon” rather than those of *The Wretched of the Earth* specifically, given Wilderson’s conventional academic preference for a colonially decontextualized *Black Skin, White Masks*.

No antithesis of “slavery,” colonialism becomes unrecognizable as colonialism in Wilderson in ways sacrificial of the Blacks and Blackness subject to it—on and off official plantations. Firstly, colonialism cannot be granted as an object of study to “postcolonial” theory in US or Western academia. It can only *appropriate* the matter or study of colonialism—from the long history of anti-colonialist theory and praxes preceding it and persisting in spite of it—as a colonizing political act itself, an arrogant critical appropriation that Wilderson routinely accepts without question. What’s more, slavery in “Plantation America” is colonial slavery, just as colonialism is a slaveocratic mode of colonialism in the Western Hemisphere. Walter Rodney was sure to note as much explicitly in articles such as “Slavery and Underdevelopment” (1979) as well as “Plantation Society in Guyana” (1981). There is no system of slavery in any part of these Americas that is not still settler colonial slavery; no settler colonialism without chattel slavery or racial slavery and their neo-slaveries. Finally in this regard, colonialism is not reducible to a simple matter of cartography—or “the postcolonial’s capacity for cartographic restoration.”³⁶ The likes of C.A. Diop and Césaire aside, this is why Amílcar Cabral could write *Our People Are Our Mountains* (1972); and why Sylvia Wynter would engage Anibal Quijano’s “coloniality of power” framework with “Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom” (2003); and why one apparently disappeared Black radical tradition would theorize “internal colonialism” or “domestic colonialism” along with “eternal colonialism” and “neo-colonialism,” from within the US imperial colony, long before the commercialization of “postcolonialism” or “postcolonial theory” in Western academia. This is further why Fanon himself would write in *A Dying Colonialism*: “It is not the soil that is occupied. It is not the ports or the airdromes. French colonialism has settled itself in the very center of the Algerian individual and has undertaken a sustained work of cleanup, of expulsion of self, of rationally pursued mutilation” (Fanon 1965, 65).³⁷ This

is why Fanon himself would write for an *El Moujahid* article now in *Toward the African Revolution*: "True liberation is not that pseudo-independence in which ministers having a limited responsibility hobnob with an economy dominated by the colonial pact. Liberation is the total destruction of the colonial system, from the pre-eminence of the language of the oppressor and 'departmentalization,' to the customs union that in reality maintains the former colonized in the meshes of the culture, of the fashion, and of the images of the colonialist."³⁸ This is also why it is important to recall that it was never a strictly cartographic colonialism bereft of slavery and Blackness that led Fanon to promulgate his vision of "new humanity" so fully and graphically in *The Wretched of the Earth* after *A Dying Colonialism* beyond *Black Skin, White Masks*.

Fanon's "Worlds," Revisited

Thus there is the serious problem of elliptical truncation in Wilderson's repeated quotation of the "end of the world" line taken from Fanon's *Black Skin, White Masks*. The "world" is never so generic and singular as pessimism would have it, whether in or outside this or that Fanon — whether it is the critical but "French" colonial Fanon or the radically decolonizing Fanon who wages pan-African revolt against the French and all colonialism. The younger Fanon wrote, "The Martinican is a man crucified. ...[M]y friend had fulfilled in a dream his wish to become white — that is, to be man. ...I will tell him, 'The environment, society are responsible for your delusion.' Once that has been said, the rest will follow of itself, and what that is we know. The end of the world."³⁹ The "world" in question is quite a specific one. It is not the only world that is, or ever was, before another must be created into being out of necessity. It is the white world that represents itself "as if" (to borrow a turn of phrase from Wynter here) it were the only world in truth.

The Fanon of *Black Skin, White Masks* was writing about a certain type or class of "Negro" who comes to crave this world. The introduction states this plainly from the start: "I shall try to discover the various attitudes that the Negro adopts in contact with the white civilization" — that "world." "The 'jungle savage' is not what I have in mind," this Fanon says with the arrogance of the colonized elite, the *assimilé* or the so-called *evolué*: "That is because for him certain factors have not yet acquired importance."⁴⁰ He is dealing with the "climbers"⁴¹ — in social class terms. If, notably, to "speak a language is to take on a world,"⁴² the "accursed" world of the Antilles is left behind by the "non-jungle savage" who strives, "climbs," in order to become truly part of the "French" world of France in his or her captured imagination. His or her portrait is exposed in "The Negro and Language,"

“The Fact of Blackness” (or “The Lived Experience of Blacks”), etc. In this case, he who can identify the need to restructure the world ends up instead getting restructured by one world himself. He moves to this other, “spatial and temporal world” of the white world—wanting, lusting for colonial liberal humanist acceptance, thinking “reason” or “rationality” can be his salvation into “recognition.” The whole world dominated by the white world is the only world that this genre of “Negro” and the white world values, a pivotal distinction effaced by Afro-pessimism (2.0). But, of course, he finds nullification in that world of his cultivated longings. After all, a “normal Negro child, having grown up within a normal family, will become abnormal on the slightest contact with the white world.”⁴³ Moreover, “[in] the white world,” Fanon writes, the “man of color” encounters “difficulty in the development of his bodily schema.”⁴⁴ He would experience his body as a “corporal malediction” insofar as he identifies this really white world as the only “real” world that could really, possibly matter to him and to all real, rational “men” for whom jungles and savagery are merely things of the past.⁴⁵

Négritude tempts the early Fanon’s search for a “manhood” shared in the West with another, historical take on worlds: “The white man wants the world; he wants it for himself alone. ...Like a magician, I robbed the white man of ‘a certain world,’ forever after lost to him and his.”⁴⁶ Let this not be deleted from canonical-myopic readings of *Black Skin, White Masks*—*qua* “Fanon.” It was inspired by Léopold Senghor. But it is Césaire who provides a general resource-book for Fanon’s worldings here. The reference to *Return to My Native Land* is extensive in this regard. He would tell Jean-Paul Sartre, accordingly: “There will always be a world—a white world—between you and us.”⁴⁷ (92). The Césaire text shifts to “The Rebel,” however, in *The Wretched of the Earth* when Fanon is no longer ashamed to identify with the Haitian Revolution as he was in *Black Skin, White Masks* (“I am a man. ...I am not solely responsible for the revolt in Santo Domingo”⁴⁸), as a soon-to-be world-famous and world-infamous champion of Algerian and African Revolution himself. That is when “civilization” and “savagery” will have come to mean extremely different things for the iconic anti-colonialist Black revolutionary psychiatrist with a hospital now named for him in Blida, a militant ambassadorship to Ghana behind him, a neuropsychiatric day center in Tunisia cofounded by him, and a national archive now named for him in Algiers, among other things and other places. Indeed, this is how his decolonizing praxis would essentially *rewrite* his “Antillais et Africains” article from earlier years.

All told, Fanon made substantial reference to the Black world, the African world as well as the Arab world over and against the white world, “the settler’s world,” the colonial world (“cut in two”), the Western world, and much more. The white world masquerading as

“the world,” proper, is clearly exposed to be a certain world “outside” – the world of the “foreigner.”⁴⁹ The worlds of “Third Worldism” mean to upstage it at long last. The actively “underdeveloped world” will “shake” the world whose opulence is steeped in “slavery” and its “blood,”⁵⁰ destroying the colonizing zoning of Europeanism not by “rational confrontation” or conversation but through “counter-violence.”⁵¹ The move charted by the ultimate Fanon (and the bulk of Fanon) is no longer of the “climber” from “jungle” to “mother country” “manhood” but from colonized “individual” to liberated “nation” on to the un-whitened “world” at large that must be expressly expropriated from European appropriation:⁵² “It is a question of the Third World starting a new history or Man,”⁵³ Fanon writes. *The Wretched of the Earth* cannot be quarantined from Fanon’s discourse on human being and “humanism;” it is the climax of that discourse on colonial imperialism as well as slavery, for such colonialism and slavery form an inseparable complex of physical and metaphysical (or “psycho-affective”) assaults on humanity beyond the white West. Hence, it is not the end of some worlds that Fanon desires or pronounces as he speaks in their name to end the specific world held onto tightly in critique by pessimists. Routinely, white discourse becomes the only discourse there is to discuss in their own rhetorical articulations. To shear the white world of this spatial and temporal, cultural and historical specificity reinforces whiteness and “anti-Blackness,” so to speak; it reinforces “Eurocentrism” or Europeanism and naturalizes by systematically totalizing the “anti-Black” power of a provincial and solipsistic white-supremacism; and, in this reinforcement, the elliptical truncation of the “end of the world” discourse in Fanon’s *Black Skin, White Masks* and more radically so elsewhere provides an explanation for what Sexton cannot fathom in “The Social Life of Social Death” (2011), that is, how or why “Afro-pessimism” (2.0) could be so curtly dismissed by many critics as another “anti-Black” discourse itself.

After Wynter – On Human Being and Western-Bourgeois Man

The subtitle of Wynter’s essay on the “coloniality of *being*, power, *truth*, and *freedom*” is “Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation – An Argument.” How could the “new” articulation of the old “Afro-pessimism” fail for so long to engage the epic critical oeuvre of such an epic Black intellectual figure, while claiming to explore these precise questions of Blackness and “the Human,” to boot? If much or most of Fanon is quarantined by Afro-pessimism (2.0), its evasion of her has long had the air of a kind of a *boycott*. Though her transcontinental Black intellectual career begins in dance and theatre as well as literature including a landmark novel, *The Hills of Hebron* (1962), she launches her tradition of the epic critical essay perhaps

more or less midstream. One might date it from “The Ceremony Must Be Found: After Humanism” (1984) and note its enduring continuation in “The Ceremony Found: Toward the Autopoetic Turn/Overturn, Its Autonomy of Human Agency and Extraterritoriality of (Self-) Cognition” (2015), one of her most recent publications. There is also “Beyond the Word of Man” (1989) in addition to “Beyond Miranda’s Meanings” (1990), where Wynter exposes liberalism, Marxism as well as feminism as mere “sub/versions” (or subordinate versions) of Western “Man” or “humanism.” She wrote “No Humans Involved: An Open Letter to My Colleagues” (1992) after the “Rodney King” controversy of white police terror in Los Angeles while still teaching at Stanford University or in the same state as the principal neo-pessimists of the University of California system. The quincentennial of Colombian pseudo-discovery was analyzed in “1492: A New World View” (1995), whose title alone highlights the Anglo-American provincialism of Afro-pessimism (2.0). These pessimists analytically bind “race” and “slavery” to the pre- and post-1865 space of the white US state with neither Black anti-colonialism nor Black anti-imperialism nor pan-African Black internationalism in evidence. Wynter’s interview with David Scott in *Small Axe* is entitled “The Re-Enchantment of Humanism” (2000). Whereas her interview with *PROUD FLESH* coincides with her focus in the same year for “On How We Mistook the Map for the Territory and Re-Imprisoned Ourselves in Our Unbearable Wrongness of Being: Black Studies Toward the Human Project” (2006). Her acceptance letter for the Order of Jamaica she was awarded in 2010 invokes her “After Man, Toward the Human” conception which necessarily moves beyond “the now globally hegemonic Western European secular and thereby naturalized understanding of being human.”⁵⁴ Other scholars may begin of late to put a few citations of her “in vogue,” academically speaking, for chic, “neo-niggerati” postures within disciplines and “inter-disciplines” very much against her own, actual intellectual practice. Yet, remarkably, Sexton does not discover two pieces by her in print until 2016—for a mere footnote problematic in multiple respects:⁵⁵ Wynter remains an overwhelmingly unread and unrecognized epic for this Afro-pessimism, its chief proponents in particular.

Still, there are colossal and irreconcilable differences between Wynter’s life-work on humanism—a “project” of “human being”—and their belated pessimism. As she pinpoints time and again, her critical target is “Man.” Wilderson and company play with the category of “the Human” but demonstrate no literacy in the comprehensive history and discourse of Western “Man,” as such, and certainly not as a decidedly bourgeois epistemic discourse in the present day. They casually conflate this “Man” with “the Human” that they criticize, rhetorically and discursively, as much as Wynter has insisted upon the

radical distinction between “Man” and “the Human” as the heart of the matter at hand. The “Man” she targets is not “the Human” at all. It represents (or “over-represents”) itself *as if* it were “the Human” – in order to deny any projected humanity of others, its “Human Others” so to speak. This is her sermonizing refrain. Under the West, “Man” wants and needs to be taken for “the Human,” and “Afro-pessimisms” oblige. *Specifying*, crucially, Wynter targets “Ethno-Class Man.” She targets “Western bourgeois Man,” which is barely a “Western bourgeois humanism,” arguably, for it is not a “humanism” for or of “humanity” but a species-negating pseudo-humanism for “Man” and the world of the dominant or hegemonic Western bourgeoisie. Wynter would coin the term “mono-humanism” since that nominal “humanism” of “Man” seeks to suppress any other discourse of “human being” that could historically contest and/or displace it. She regularly recalls Clifford Geertz’s description of the “local culture” of the West⁵⁶ to refuse European cultural imperialism in general. She particularizes that “culture” and she particularizes its projected “humanism” as it imposes itself globally as well as locally under the falsely universalizing name of “Man.” And, categorically, *both* the “indio” and the “negro” confront humanist subjection here well beyond the politics of land or land rights in continental Africa and the hemispheric Americas centuries before Wilderson’s Anglo-North American discourse of “Native Americans” ever comes into English-language use in British settler-colonial territories. As Wynter excavates the discursive foundations of the “modern” world, her Black radical project has been to map out new territory of Black and human liberation from “Man” or his misappropriation of “the Human,” a Black world project of “human being” symptomatically evaded and occluded by the “Afro-pessimisms” that render “Man” as “the Human” – and “the white world” merely as ‘the world’ itself.

Reflecting further on these matters in “PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter,” she literally begins the exchange by asking: “Why does this meaning have to be put on being Black—this meaning of non-being?”⁵⁷ She continues to discuss “psycho-intellectual” struggles and “anti-Blackness” before there was any such thing as an Afro-pessimism recycled: “Then you can understand why in the ‘60s it wasn’t just a call for Black Studies; it was a call for Black Aesthetics, it was a call for Black Art, it was a call for Black Power. It was an understanding that, as Lewis Gordon has been the first to keep insisting, we live in an anti-Black world—a systematically anti-Black world.”⁵⁸ When the terms “anti-Black” or “anti-Blackness” are used these days, in academic contexts and on social media and in “nonprofit activism,” a false genealogy is assumed that routes it away from Gordon’s *Bad Faith and Antiblack Racism* (1995) or his Fanonist epistemic politics of Black liberation, only to credit and bolster pessi-

mism with such quasi-literate revisionism. Broadly, Wynter retraces the work of the Black Arts Movement, the Black Aesthetic Movement, the Black Power Movement and the Black Studies Movement along with other Black anti-colonial movements for Black liberation worldwide, all of which generate a historic transformation or transvaluation of the meaning of “Black” beyond “black” as well as “slave” or “Slave” and mount major if incomplete challenges to the mono-humanism of Western “Man” masquerading as “the Human.” What’s more, she zeroes in on the “Americanism” reiterated by Wilderson with her sort of Malcolmite treatment of the Duboisian “double-consciousness” so characteristic of “Negro” elites everywhere: “He’s really saying that to be an ‘American’ and a ‘Man’ he has to be anti-Negro; and, therefore, he’s struggling because he doesn’t want to give up [the idea of] being an ‘American.’ I had of course to put in the concept of ‘Man’ which he doesn’t use. He says to be an ‘American’ and a ‘Negro.’ But I want to argue that to be an ‘American’ is perhaps the fullest embodiment of this conception of the human, ‘Man’ (in which we now realize ourselves).”⁵⁹ Her repressed body of work exposes the “humanist” Americanism and larger Occidental “humanism” of this new-old Afro-pessimism with ease.

The Death of “Social Death” and Its Death?

With Wynter nowhere in sight, without any scenario of resistance or revolt ever in the vicinity of slavery’s consideration, Wilderson would facilitate a revival of the writing of Orlando Patterson thanks to a cherry-picked reference to *Slavery and Social Death* (1982). An anonymous introduction to a recent “Afro-pessimism” reader describes the conservative sociologist as “erudite,” simple and plain, customarily bracketing a host of controversial issues central to any intellectual analysis of “Blackness” and “humanity.”⁶⁰ Vincent Brown pointed out a decided misreading of the juridical notion of “social death” before the rise of the death cult of Afro-pessimism (2.0), which fetishizes it without understanding evidently or critical interrogation.⁶¹ But there is much more to note on this matter. Patterson is a historical sociologist of Occidentalism. His career promotion of a meta-narrative of “Western freedom” is inseparable from his academic narrative of slavery and his sociological promotion of sexual integration via intermarriage of Black women with white men in *Rituals of Blood: The Consequences of Slavery in Two American Centuries* (1999). How is this not a neo-slavery of concubinage made conjugal and synonymous with “life” itself? His sociology of slavery is one of Western socio-cultural assimilation and US-American political accommodation. What a contrast with the Diop and Amadiume perspective on “racial patriarchy” and European empire. The reincarnation of Afro-pessimism avoids examination of

Patterson's Occidentalism and its resultant *investment* in Black "social death" as a fetish and a phantasm. But Wynter would not by any means. She ordinarily writes of "master codes" of "symbolic life and death" as the central organizing principles of *all* human social orders of existence, not merely the "master codes" of plantation so-called "slavemasters" whose antebellum legal statutes could be mistaken for an uncontested reflection of actual historical reality by a subsequent school of scholars. The "death" discourse of Patterson is a vector of white disciplinary power that was so frontally challenged by Black Studies in the 1960s. Regarding history, Sterling Stuckey wrote in *Amistad*, symbolically: "white historians as a group are about as popular among Black people as white policemen."⁶² Regarding sociology, Joyce A. Ladner edited *The Death of White Sociology* (1973) in a sort of homicidal death wish for Western "knowledge production" and "white middle-class values" — not a death cult, a death drive, a death fetish or an acceptance of "social death" propaganda for Black people or Black social history. But these beasts die hard. Decades ago, Wynter could identify a crude Western narrative of *unfreedom* from Patterson's earliest writings on slavery: "Dr. Patterson purports to discover in Cudjoe [the legendary leader of the Leeward Maroons in Jamaica] an almost cowardly desire to avoid battle and to escape detection. Such criticism suggests a lack of understanding of the now well recognized tactics of successful guerilla warfare, tactics which Cudjoe had brilliantly developed centuries before their use by the Chinese and Cuban revolutionaries of modern times!"⁶³ This was her in *Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World*, the massive 900-plus page manuscript that she wrote in the 1970s for the Institute of the Black World and which Derrick White describes as a prelude to her ... work on humanism or her "Theory of the Human."⁶⁴

The tacit, presumed history of slavery inked by Wilderson's "Afro-pessimism" cannot break free of the infamous Stanley Elkins school of historiography. Both Elkins and Wilderson share the same geopolitical contours of Anglo-American nationalism — "slavery" is the US settler state of slavery delinked from the rest of the world — if one inscribes "happiness" in supposed "docility" during slavery, the other re-inscribes that "docility" with "suffering." Black or African revolt never rocks Afro-pessimism's slavery, or its whiteness, nor Elkins's "Sambo" national fantasy and related "Sambo" historiography. For him, as for Wilderson, Africans could only emerge from the "Middle Passage" as *tabulae rasae* — negro, or "black," but "no longer" African of any sort or in any way. This *Maafta* or "Middle Passage" depiction is a white mythology passed on yet long debunked elsewhere. Okun Edet Uya even showed in "The Middle Passage and Personality Change among Diaspora Africans" (1993) how new African-based modes of kinship were developed on the "slave ships" that supposedly eliminated

Africinity and kinship among the enslaved. Much later, Eric Robert Taylor made a study of hundreds of officially documented and often successful anti-slavery revolts aboard in *If We Must Die: Shipboard Insurrections in the Era of the Atlantic Slave Trade* (2006), subverting or sabotaging some of the most beloved academic folklore at the base. But white nationalism needs this phantasmagoria; it needs the “negro” rhetorically de-Africanized before it is semantically recoded as “black” or, in Wilderson, “Black.” On a smaller scale, this white settler mythology also ignores the falsely framed “Herskovits-Frazier” debate; the essence of the very concept of “diaspora” widely commercialized in academia now; and the once popular if passing historiographical trend focusing on “small” or “day-to-day” resistance to slavery without threatening the fundamental politics of US national history as a professional discipline in the West.⁶⁵ More stunning still in its demystification of the *tabula rasa* dogma of Elkins’s “Sambo” (and hence Wilderson’s “Black/Slave”) is the heretical and exhaustive historical work of Gerald Horne: *The Counter Revolution of 1776: Slave Resistance and the Origins of the United States of the America* (2014) flies infinitely beyond the prior research of Herbert Aptheker’s *American Negro Slave Revolts* (1943) and “Maroons within the Present Limits of the United States” (1939). Horne meticulously chronicles how maroonage determine the outlines of the US state merely assumed by Wilderson. The white power discourse sacralized in critique by Afro-pessimism (2.0) is revealed not to be total or absolute at all but delirious, addicted, and desperate in the face of chronic, raucous, and hemispheric Black-African resistance and revolt. The anti-pessimist James Baldwin’s account of white nationalist histories that represent the enslavement of Africans as “nothing more than a record of humiliations gladly endured”⁶⁶ can help explain Elkins and Wilderson’s “histories” as ideological pieces of a sado-masochist historiographical whole. There is little to nothing but “docile” humiliation in either case—with or without the overtly nationalist narrative of “happiness,” with or without the covertly white nationalist narrative of “suffering.”

In the end, it is also telling that this “Afro-pessimist” embrace of “social death” has never thought to ask what or whose conception of the “social” and whose or what conception of “death” is assumed by the notion, not to mention how African people would respond to it accordingly over time and in various theaters of struggle. This is a Western cosmology of “death” not lived by Black people who do more than just die passively on white Western terms. One might only recall the many African Studies discussions of John Mbiti’s *African Religion and Philosophy* (1969) with its multiplying categories of the long, recently, soon-to-be and living “dead.” The entire history of modern slavery is rife with live conflicts in conceptions of life and death between Africa and Europe in or en route to the Americas and

back. This topic is a rich one in Wynter's *Black Metamorphosis* where many a rebel against slavery mounts the execution platform singing and laughing in communal glee at the prospect of returning home in valor via a spiritual escape from Western conceptions of "life" as well as Western conceptions of "death." Audre Lorde encodes as much in *Our Dead Behind Us* (1986), its ancestral call animating an ongoing life of revolt in the flesh. Another poet of the Black Arts Movement, Jayne Cortez celebrates Black defiance of death and a Black *murder* of white life which her Black life sees as no kind of life of at all: "Death, you are ugly. You are white. Death, you are death no more.... Liberation in my head. Liberation in my eye.... I've killed fear and my soul's on fire. I confess I am armed and prepared to reproduce the love that made me live."⁶⁷ A slate of revolutionary figures of the iconic Black Panther Party also brilliantly re-theorized life, death and existence under colonial slavery and neo-slavery. Huey P. Newton's *To Die for the People* (1972) and *Revolutionary Suicide* (1973) cast the ruling oppressor's "life" as a "reactionary suicide" leading to a sorry death without significance. Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter exceeded the Western bourgeois conceit of biological life in "Black Mother," a poem where he achieves his humanity and his mother's freedom in the daring disdain for "natural death" driving his outlaw rebellion: "for a slave of natural death who dies / can't balance out to two dead flies."⁶⁸ Like a Panther archetype himself, George Jackson found immortal life in revolutionary praxis and maintains in *Blood in My Eye* (1972) that the "social" in Western "society" is not truly "social" at all since this colonial-fascist formation does not produce "society" in fact but "hierarchy" whose aim is to fabricate the illusion of a "society above society" to rule.⁶⁹ He could have been speaking of prison or pessimism when he wrote in *Soledad Brother* (1970): "They've been 'killing all the niggers' for nearly half a millennium now, but I am still alive. I might be the most resilient dead man in the universe. The upsetting thing is that they never take into consideration the fact that I am going to resist."⁷⁰

Conclusion

A few years after the appearance of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, which is listed atop the bibliography of the "Afro-Pessimism" page of Incognero.com, Ayi Kwei Armah published his fourth novel, *Two Thousand Seasons*. It was in part an occasion for Armah to respond to interpreters of his literary debut in the West who had been hungry or programmed for images of continental African despair. The text of this now classic novel remembers and foretells a long struggle; and its central characters are up to the task. They are clear that white missionaries mean to "eternalize" their slavery and deliver them with "slavery disguised as freedom."⁷¹ They pledge to live their lives against the

forces of destruction without expecting revolution in their lifetimes: “it was only parasites, not creators, who found long lives to live” at this moment in history.⁷² The wise if not omniscient narrative voice declares in conclusion, “Know this: we continue.” “Know this also: discouraging is loss, discouraging even the mere contemplation of the destroyers’ massive weapons of death. But we have seen the destroyers’ force hurled against us turn to strength against the hurlers, and we know our way lies beyond despair.”⁷³ The response is never pessimism. The response is a warning against it. The response is a critique of the propensity to fall into the laid trap. The closing pages of *Two Thousand Seasons* thus takes stock of spiritually weaker elements: “They forget that our people are not just of the present...but many, many gone and many, many more to come.... What are we if we see nothing beyond the present, hear nothing from the ages of our flowing, and in all our existence can utter no necessary preparation of the future way?”⁷⁴ To read *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born* without *Two Thousand Seasons* may be critically suspect, but to read any of Armah’s texts as pessimist, or “Afro-pessimist,” following the white Western critical establishment which historically deploys pessimism to naturalize the pervasive idea of African condemnation, this is politically and intellectually absurd.

Recently, Jared Sexton writes in “Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word” (2016) that “the principal author” of this discourse is “a noted creative writer” and “its first major statement is found in an award-winning literary work of memoir.”⁷⁵ Fashionable theoreticism be damned, it might very well help to view this Afro-pessimism (2.0) as some kind of fiction or an aestheticizing subjectivism. The term itself barely appears in *Red, White & Black*, let alone *Incognegro* where its use in South Africa would have gotten quite interesting indeed. The term arguably “happens” with a branding beyond these books in North America; and this official “Afro-Pessimism” (2.0) defends itself by revisionism and denegation in order to continue the branding in commercial academia.⁷⁶ The problem is obviously not any word’s supposed lack of clarity. What a bizarre retort. The problem is the intellectual history and politics occluded and recycled by the paradigm whose branding is actually a *re-branding*; the *re-branding* inheritance of a “rooster’s egg” hatched under white Western slavery, colonialism, and imperialism – with a discarded corpse of Africa muddling as a discursive background.

Unlike other “Afro-pessimists” inspired by *Red, White & Black*, Frank B. Wilderson III is fond of invoking Assata Shakur of the Black Panthers as well as the Black Liberation Army. There is no small place for her in the world of *Two Thousand Seasons* which stages anti-slavery revolt and guerilla maroonage on the African continent. But her highly selective use for Afro-pessimism is problematic, to say the least. She’d

proclaim in her "Letter to the Pope" (1998), writing from political asylum in Cuba with a bounty on her head: "Well, I might be a slave, but I will go to my grave a rebellious slave."⁷⁷ This is not the slavery of Afro-pessimism's "Slavery" or its "Black/Slave" neatly bound up by the US state and a white ideology of Americanism. She opens *Assata: An Autobiography* (1987) with a poem entitled "Affirmation," an affirmation of life as opposed to death or "social death" validations: "I believe in living," she repeats: "I believing in living.... And I believe that a lost ship / steered by tired, seasick sailors, / can still be guided home / to port."⁷⁸ She maintains this line of thought through the closing poem of *Assata*, "Tradition," whose Black history of Black revolt and Global African geography of Blackness has been so unthinkable in Afro-pessimism (2.0): "Blood flowed in the Atlantic / and it wasn't all ours.... We ran, we fought / We organized a railroad / And underground / We carried it on."⁷⁹ She literally revolts against the idea that "slaves hadn't fought back."⁸⁰

The brief appearance of the "BLA" as metaphor is an admittedly isolated example in *Red, White & Black's* chapter on Haile Gerima's cinema (1975). Oddly, critical options for Black political paradigms before then were reduced to a binary couplet of "Afrocentricism" and "Afro-pessimism."⁸¹ This use of the BLA for pessimism is quite problematic too. To employ the "BLA" sign as a generic metaphor for Black militancy is terribly dangerous since it is a specific name which remains an index of the tragic COINTELPRO factionalization of the Black Panther Party, a conflict abiding still among its survivors today. The non-metaphorical BLA was furthermore an anti-colonialist and anti-imperialist, unmistakably anti-americanist political network that did not view land or "land restoration" as an issue foreign to Black people, Blackness, or Black liberation struggle. It contextualizes Shakur's family battles to emancipate their Black land from white legal and extra-legal expropriation in the Carolinas. The BLA made revolutionary alliance—some of which produced political prisoners still incarcerated and not for the multiculturalist conflicts of identity politics liberally debated in Western bourgeois academia. Their Fanon was primarily the Fanon of *The Wretched of the Earth* and its Africa was not sealed off from them by "Slavery"—it was tenaciously theirs as unbreakable "Afrikans" themselves. Like their movement peers, they studied the Black history of Black revolt against slavery in and outside of the US settler slave state; and they understood that they were not an "exceptional" moment of resistance in their history as they are for Wilderson's *Red, White & Black* or "Cinematic Unrest: *Bush Mama* and the Black Liberation Army." They were indeed carrying on a tradition when they carried on their "counter-violence." "There is, and always will be, until every Black man, woman, and child is free, a Black Liberation Army,"⁸² *Assata* broadcasts. This continuity scarcely

excludes the past upheld in “Tradition” and elsewhere. This is why the Shakur uninvoked by Wilderson would proclaim herself, without pessimism—in many underground communiqués circulated from the Caribbean (“West Indies”) of her exile—a “Maroon Woman”: “I am and feel like a Maroon Woman. I will never voluntarily accept the condition of slavery, whether it’s de-facto or ipso-facto, official or unofficial.”⁸³

However, maroonage appears to be the most unspeakable and unaffordable antithesis for all Afro-pessimism. Regard, finally, Wilderson’s treatment of Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead* (1991), a novel that its author once described as her “763-page indictment for 500 years of theft, murder, pillage, and rape ... slaughter ... slaughter ... slaughter.”⁸⁴ He rebukes Silko and *Almanac* in *Red, White & Black* for scripting but one Black character and making him over in the image of “indigenism.” He contends, “Clinton, the Black, is the only main character who does not come to this ambitious novel with his own philosophical endowments, his own treasure chest of intellectual capital.”⁸⁵ Actually, “indigenous” does not just mean “Native Americans” or “Indians” in the Americas for Silko among others; and, conceivably, Black as well as Native American communities could conduct a greater discussion of how “Native American” novelists develop or represent how many “Black” characters *and* how “Black” novelists develop or represent how many “Native American” characters in these literatures. In any event, key Black-African points of reference in Silko’s discourse get erased or negated by Wilderson. He does not see, recall or mention either Clinton’s matrilineal remembrance of his “grannies” in the novel or other character reports of a woman called “Mama Marie,” an “African woman who was leading an army of rebels somewhere in Africa.”⁸⁶ The latter is Clinton’s revolutionary equivalent on the continent, the African continent that perversely ceases to exist for this Afro-pessimism reboot. Clinton’s family arms him with African spirit protection before the US state sends him off to Vietnam. The knife that his people (“women and men alike”) carry at all times is not the knife of a racist stereotype. They endow him with the protection that the “philosophical endowment” of *Ogun* provides: Clinton is a child of *Ogun*. He makes an ancestral shrine for “him” in Vietnam, and this is quite the “treasure chest.” Yet, refusing that African inheritance, Wilderson characterizes Clinton as “substitutively dead,”⁸⁷ resorting to Western psychoanalysis and remaining firmly within his and Afro-pessimism’s Occidentalst conception of life and death. Silko’s *Almanac* makes it clear that *Ogun*’s knife saves Clinton’s life: “Clinton had been hit by flying shrapnel that killed three men nearby. The handle of the knife had been shattered by shrapnel, but miraculously, Clinton had escaped with minor injuries.... Clinton felt this power long before he studied African religions in black studies and realized his family’s

regard for knives was a remnant of African religion."⁸⁸ Wilderson does not recognize Ogun or cannot realize a "diaspora literacy" in African divinities, critically de-Africanizing "the Black" for "Afro-pessimism" as a rule. An extensive prayer for Ogun is soon reproduced by Silko to further "endow" and elaborate Clinton. The next section of the novel is explicitly entitled "Ogoun, the Knife" for the divine "Ironmaker" who "was the guerilla warrior of hit and run scorched earth and no prisoners."⁸⁹ Besides a great pantheon of African spirits to come, "Ogoun" is called on here with Eurzulie and "the Great Damballah" who is also central to Silko's reflections on "snake deities" in both "Tribal Prophecies" and "Notes on *Almanac of the Dead*" from another book, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (1996), where she'd insist and insist—*pace* Wilderson's later claims in *Red, White & Black*, there could be no *Almanac* without Damballah.⁹⁰

If Ogun or "Yoruba" *orisa* frameworks do not count as anything intellectual for Wilderson, another "philosophical endowment" for Clinton writ large in *Almanac* is his "Black Studies." Clinton is virtually possessed, mounted and ridden by it in the spirit of the Black Studies recounted by Sylvia Wynter. Black Studies ("in its original thrust") is "the only subject he cared about in college," before its eventual academic domestication; and it supplies the prototype for his poignant "Liberation Radio Broadcasts," such as "Clinton's Slavery Broadcast" and "First Successful Slave Revolution in the Americas."⁹¹ (Does Wilderson expect people not to read Silko's hefty *Almanac*, or is he unable to read its pages of Blackness and Africinity himself?) "Clinton didn't care if his radio broadcasts sounded like lectures from a Black Studies class.... The powers who controlled the United States didn't want the people to know their history. If the people knew their history, they would realize they must rise up."⁹² This is a Black Studies and a history unknowable in Afro-pessimism. The text of *Almanac* will segue to several pages traversed by a long list of uprisings across the hemisphere: "Indigenous American uprisings had been far more extensive than any European wanted to admit, not the even the Marxists, who were jealous of African and Native American slave workers who had risen up successfully against colonial masters without the leadership of a white man."⁹³

Enter "old Boukman and Old Koromantin"⁹⁴—or the maroonage of Haiti and Jamaica in the tradition systematically occluded by Afro pessimism (2.0) with its reflex re-canonization of "slavery" and "social death." Through Clinton, Silko's *Almanac of the Dead* anchors itself in the "high mountain strongholds" of this geopolitically boundless maroonage: "Clinton wanted Black people to know all their history; he wanted them to know all that had gone on before in Africa; how great and powerful gods had travelled from Africa with the people. He wanted Black Americans to know how deeply African blood had

watered the soil of the Americans for five hundred years. But there had been an older and deeper connection between Africa and the Americas, in the realm of spirits.... From the beginning, Africans had escaped and hid in the mountains where they met up with survivors of indigenous tribes hiding in remote strongholds. In the mountains the Africans had discovered a wonderful thing: certain African gods had located themselves in the Americas as well as Africa."⁹⁵ The meaning of "indigenism" is not pitifully restricted. Here, the Haitian Revolution proves itself to be another "philosophical endowment," tremendous "intellectual capital," for Clinton as character and teacher-messenger or Black leader of revolution, although its mammoth stature and trans-Atlantic impact must make a mockery out of that limited capitalist terminology. Totally bewitching *Almanac*, that Revolution is by most relevant accounts maroonage on the grandest scale.

While *Red, White & Black* cannot conceive of "Black Indians," historically, with a critical hostility to "analogy" rearticulating some essential metaphysical schisms and dichotomies, its charge that Clinton is an "Indian" in blackface is ironic in the extreme given Wilderson and company's ill-acknowledged blackfacing of the old colonial-imperialist discourse of Afro-pessimism (1.0). A historicizing Tunde Zack-Williams writes in "Contemporary Africa and the Spirit of Amistad" (2013), for an issue of *Africa Update* edited by Gloria Emeagwali: "By Afro-pessimism, I refer to that genre that constitutes a series of discourses which emerged in the post 1970s era, which sought to create a series of narratives around African exceptionalism by representing Africa and its people as different *sui generis* from other human beings and human settlements. Afro-Pessimism took its inspiration from travellers and explorers, 'the rumors of angels,' and the Atlantic trade. Colonial literature has much influenced Afro-pessimism; with colonial writers such as Conrad, Rider Haggard and Kipling being major sources of inspiration." She adds that this dominating discoursing of the continent has sought "to represent Africa to a Western audience as the alter ego of the West by renewing the tradition of colonial anthropology of pathologizing African realities and presenting an image of the African as the 'Other,' who mimics European institutions and policies in an alien environment." Echoing Emeagwali's realist "parody" of six types of Afro-pessimists, she identifies the "apogee" of this discourse with a May 2000 issue of *The Economist* entitled "The Hopeless Continent," observing: "In terms of public policies, Afro-pessimists question the efficacy of aid to African countries, since it disappears into the quagmire of neo-patrimonial politics. Afro-pessimism has its 'right' and 'left' dimensions; you know them when you encounter them. They claim to speak for the African masses, when in fact they serve the interests of global capital and their domestic lackeys."⁹⁶ *Voila* the repressed and repressive idiom that has been recast in the

amerikan “humanities” and rebranded as a “Black” and “Black radical” discourse for the market. Cheikh Anta Diop would encapsulate this contemporary history in the context of a much longer history and metaphysical empire of Euro-pessimism for “humanity” at large and Africa or Africans most of all. In any case, whatever could be said about Silko’s narrativization of Clinton in *Almanac of the Dead*, she animates him with the most epic “endowments” of the Pan-African world. Militantly akin to Shakur’s “Maroon Woman,” he is outlined as a Black man of maroonage—but this is not the stuff of pessimism, “Afro-pessimism” (2.0) or otherwise.

Notes

1. James Baldwin in *I Am Not Your Negro*, Raoul Peck dir. (2016).
2. Toni Cade Bambara, “Salvation Is the Issue” in *Black Women Writers (1950–1980): A Critical Evaluation*, Mari Evans ed. (Garden City: Anchor Books, 1984) 46–47.
3. George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1994) 234.
4. Jayne Cortez, *Celebrations and Solitudes* (New York: Strata-East, 1974) 5.
5. Ayi Kwei Armah, “Who Are the Beautiful Ones?” in *Remembering the Dismembered Continent* (Popenguine, Senegal: Per Ankh, 2010) 267.
6. *Ibid.* 268.
7. *Ibid.* 271.
8. *Ibid.* 275.
9. *Ibid.* 273.
10. *Ibid.* 280.
11. Fred Moten, “Blackness and Nothingness (Mysticism in the Flesh)” in *South Atlantic Quarterly* Volume 112, Number 4 (Fall 2013) 737–780. Sexton refers to a number of other “optimistic” texts by Moten in “The Social Life of Social Death: On Afro-Pessimism and Black Optimism” in *InTensions* Number 5 (Fall/Winter 2011) 1–47.
12. C.A. Diop, *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* (London: Karnak House, 1989) 177.
13. *Ibid.* 177.
14. *Ibid.* 180.
15. *The Cultural Unity of Black Africa* may represent the matrix of Diop’s ideas on the metaphysical systems or ideological history of pessimism and optimism, but it does not stop there. Immanuel Wallerstein’s summation of this thought was reproduced by Mercer Cook’s “Translator’s Preface” in *African Origin of Civilization: Myth or Reality* (1974). Diop also disputes the unexamined assumptions of Friedrich Nietzsche in *Toward the African Renaissance* (1996) by remarking: “Here the contrast seems profound. From the time of Ancient Egypt to present, the African has never thought of founding a durable moral or metaphysical system that is

based on pessimism” (Diop, *Cultural Unity* 134–35). It was in *Civilization or Barbarism: An Authentic Anthropology* that Diop demystified Ernest Renan’s Eurocentric assumption that “only pessimism is fecund.” Alternatively, he asks and signifies: “Could Africa, with the warmth of her social fabric, save Western man from his pessimism and individualistic solitude?” (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1991, 361). Here Diop also noted that the cosmogony of Plato was imbued with optimism, an exception to the rule of Indo-European pessimism and an obvious “heritage of the African school”: “Plato’s god, like his prototype Ra, creates nothing but order and beauty, or the Good, by introducing harmony — mathematics — into evolution; neither he nor Ra creates *ex nihilo*: Beauty and Good merge together in both cosmogonic systems, which share the same optimism” (Ibid. 338, 342).

16. Amadiume in Diop, *Cultural Unity* xix.
17. Trinh T. Minh-ha, *Woman, Native, Other* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1989) 57.
18. Gloria Emeagwali, “Six Types of Afro-pessimists” in *Udadisi*, December 24, 2012, available at <http://udadisi.blogspot.com/2012/12/six-types-of-afro-pessimists.html> (Accessed February 10, 2017).
19. Ibid.
20. Saidiya V. Hartman, *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux 2007).
21. Frank B. Wilderson III, “Afro-Pessimism & the End of Redemption” in *The Occupied Times*, March 30, 2016, <https://theoccupiedtimes.org/?p=14236> [n.d.].
22. Ibid.
23. Ibid.
24. The historical play with dates can go back and for with dates indexing “abolition” of “trade” versus actual enslavement; slavery in the local metropolitan country of the empire versus its overseas empire of colonies; slavery in this or that region of a country versus another region or section; general state abolition versus corporate exceptions for companies distinct from state formations, not to mention delayed or graduated “emancipation” (as in, say, 20-year “apprenticeships” in the meantime) — or any supposed “abolition” to be revoked and reversed for official slavery’s repetition or reinstatement out of European self-interest at any possible time.
25. Wilderson, “Afro-Pessimism & the End of Redemption.”
26. Wole Soyinka, “The African World and the Ethnocultural Debate” in *African Culture: The Rhythms of Unity*, M.K. Asante and K.W. Asante eds. (Trenton, NJ: Africa World Press, 1989) 16.
27. For example, George Jackson wrote in *Soledad Brother*, “We must build the true internationalism now. Getting to know people under crisis is the best way to learn them. Crisis situations show up their weakness and strength. They outline our humanity in vivid detail. If there is any basis for a belief in the universality of man then we will find it in this struggle against the enemy of all mankind.” See *Soledad Brother* 266.

28. Aimé Césaire, "Letter to Maurice Thorez" in *Social Text* 103 Volume 28, Number 2 (Summer 2010) 150.
29. Aimé Césaire, *Discourse on Colonialism*, Joan Pinkham trans. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 2000) 73.
30. Stokely Carmichael, *Stokely Speaks: From Black Power to Pan-Africanism* (Chicago: Chicago Review Press, 2007) 142.
31. "At the door of the afternoon session I ask Melvin if he had any West Indian in him. 'All that "role model stuff" and how Blacks need to stop breathing so other people can breathe—all that immigrant integrity.'" There is never an anti-racist Black social-class explanation in Wilderson, for Blackness itself. So here such political conservatism can only have a geo-cultural (even geo-ontological) explanation, one that further divides *his* conceptual "Blackness" under conquest, paradoxically, despite the overabundance of such Black elite conservatism both inside and outside the United States construct. See Frank B. Wilderson III, *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile & Apartheid* (Cambridge: South End Press) 428.
32. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White and Black* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010) 122.
33. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks* 173.
34. Wilderson, *Incognegro* 247.
35. Jared Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word" in *Rhizomes* 29 (2016) 5.
36. Wilderson, *Red, White and Black* 123.
37. Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism* 65.
38. Frantz Fanon, *Toward the African Revolution*, Haakon Chevalier trans. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1967) 105.
39. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, Charles Lam Markmann trans. (London: Pluto Press, 2008) 168.
40. *Ibid.* 5.
41. *Ibid.* 25.
42. *Ibid.* 25.
43. *Ibid.* 111.
44. *Ibid.* 83.
45. *Ibid.* 89.
46. *Ibid.* 97.
47. *Ibid.* 92.
48. *Ibid.* 176.
49. Frantz Fanon, *A Dying Colonialism*, Haakon Chevalier trans. (New York: Monthly Review Press, 1965) 139.
50. *Ibid.* 96.
51. *Ibid.* 41.
52. *Ibid.* 200.

53. Ibid. 315.
54. The Center for Caribbean Thought (The University of the West Indies at Mona, Jamaica), "Sylvia Wynter Awarded the Order of Jamaica," available at <https://www.mona.uwi.edu/cct/sylvia-wynter-awarded-order-jamaica> (Accessed May 1, 2017).
55. Only just recently does Sexton note what he dubs "a (yet undeveloped) link," mentioning two articles by Wynter, finally, as if her much earlier work now exists simply to verify the work of pessimism. Still, "Afro-pessimism" is a traditionally colonial-imperialist and racist ideological word, sensibility, and framework whose history and politics continue to be ignored by Wilderson and Sexton's adoption of it in the form of an Afro-pessimism (2.0). What's more, as a footnote, Wynter appears to be positioned here as "a woman" in a textbook sexist fashion—that is, a Black woman whose ill-considered work can serve to ratify rather than disrupt or preclude his paradigm as a mere footnote to it, an epistemological and chronological afterthought, no less—in an attempt to manage the crisis of certain gender as well as other critiques of the brand of their academic paradigm. See Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word" 19 n.7.
56. Sylvia Wynter, "Unsettling the Coloniality of Being/Power/Truth/Freedom: Towards the Human, After Man, Its Overrepresentation—An Argument" in *CR: The New Centennial Review* Volume 3, Number 3 (Fall 2003) 282.
57. Greg Thomas, "PROUD FLESH Inter/Views: Sylvia Wynter" in *ProudFlesh: New Afrikan Journal of Culture, Politics, and Consciousness* Number 4 (2006) 1.
58. Ibid. 7.
59. Ibid. 5.
60. "Isidore: A very short intro to Afro-pessimism" in *The Beli Research Institute: For Critical Thots*, February 23, 2017, available at [https://belliresearchinstitute.com/2017/02/23/a-very-short-intro-to-afro-pessimism/\[n.d.\]](https://belliresearchinstitute.com/2017/02/23/a-very-short-intro-to-afro-pessimism/[n.d.]).
61. Vincent Brown, "Social Death and Political Life in the Study of Slavery" in *The American Historical Review* Volume 114, Number 5 (December 2009) 1231–1249.
62. Sterling Stuckey, "Twilight of Our Past: Reflections on the Origins of Black History" in *Amistad 2*, John A. Williams and Charles F. Harris eds. (Vintage: New York, 1971) 291.
63. Sylvia Wynter, *Black Metamorphosis: New Natives in a New World*, unpublished manuscript, IBW Papers, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture (New York) 12.
64. Derrick White, "Black Metamorphosis: A Prelude to Sylvia Wynter's Theory of the Human" in *CLR James Journal* Volume 16, Number 1 (Fall 2010) 144.
65. C.A. Diop would anticipate future cultural discourses on the ironic Africanization of the Americas when he wrote against pessimism in *Civilization or Barbarism: "And the Blacks of the diaspora? The linguistic*

bond is broken, but the historic bond remains stronger than ever, perpetuated by memory; just as the cultural heritage of Africa, which is evident in the three Americas, attests to the continuity of cultural customs: it has even been said, I believe, that the difference between the White American and his English, or in any event European, ancestor is the Negro laugh, so pleasant, inherited from the household slave who raised his children." See Diop, *Civilization or Barbarism* 219.

66. James Baldwin, "A Talk to Teachers" in *Collected Essays* (New York: Library of America, 1998) 679.
67. Cortez, *Celebrations and Solitudes* 5.
68. Alprentice "Bunchy" Carter, "Black Mother," available at <http://ultra-wav0.wixsite.com/41central/bunchy-carter-stamp> [n.d.].
69. George L. Jackson, *Blood in My Eye* (Baltimore: Black Classic Press, 1990) 105–106.
70. Jackson, *Soledad Brother* 234.
71. Ayi Kwei Armah, *Two Thousand Seasons* (Popenguine, Senegal: Per Ankh, 2000) 170.
72. *Ibid.* 245.
73. *Ibid.* 310.
74. *Ibid.* 313.
75. Sexton, "Afro-Pessimism: The Unclear Word" 3.
76. See also in this regard Sexton, "The Social Life of Social Death."
77. Assata Shakur, "Open letter" in *Afrikan Frontline News Service*, March 31, 1998, available at <http://afrocubaweb.com/assata2.htm> (Accessed October 15, 2008).
78. Assata Shakur, *Assata: An Autobiography* (Chicago: Lawrence Hill Books, 1987) 2. This is the essence of E.R. Taylor's subsequent study of successful shipboard insurrections led by Africans enslaved on the Atlantic Ocean in *If We Must Die* and an important illustration of how the best of renegade academic scholarship often only follows in the footsteps of the praxis of revolutionary social movements in general and Black liberation movements in particular.
79. *Ibid.* 263.
80. *Ibid.* 175.
81. Wilderson, *Red, White and Black* 39.
82. Shakur, *Assata* 52.
83. Shakur, "Open Letter."
84. "Almanac of the Dead Summary" in *eNotes.com*, available at <https://www.enotes.com/topics/almanac-dead> [n.d.].
85. Wilderson, *Red, White and Black* 240.
86. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1991) 411.

87. Wilderson, *Red, White & Black* 240.
88. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead* 413.
89. *Ibid.* 417.
90. Leslie Marmon Silko, *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* (New York: Simon & Schuster Inc., 1996). Without Damballah or the snake symbolism liberated from Western interpretation, there'd be no *Almanac of the Dead*; and Zora Neale Hurston's *Tell My Horse* (1938) frequently frames Silko's own spoken reflections on the ten years she says she spent writing this novel as a kind of an ancestral medium.
91. Silko, *Almanac of the Dead* 426-31.
92. *Ibid.* 431.
93. *Ibid.* 527-30.
94. *Ibid.* 425.
95. *Ibid.* 416.
96. Tunde Zack-Williams, "Contemporary Africa and the Spirit of Amistad" in *Africa Update* Volume XX, Number 2 (Spring 2013), available at <https://web.ccsu.edu/afstudy/upd20-2.html#Cont%20Africa> (Accessed March 27, 2017).