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## FIFTEEN

# Refusing Blackness-as-Victimization

*Trayvon Martin and the Black Cyborgs*

João Costa Vargas and Joy A. James

Black Revolutionaries do not drop from the moon. We are created by our conditions, shaped by our oppression.

—Assata Shakur

Henceforward, the interests of one will be the interests of all, for in concrete fact *everyone* will be discovered by the troops, *everyone* will be massacred—or *everyone* will be saved.

—Frantz Fanon

### BLACKNESS IN DEMOCRACY'S GRAVEYARD

What happens when, instead of becoming enraged and shocked every time a black person is killed in the United States, we recognize black death as a predictable and constitutive aspect of this democracy? What will happen then if instead of demanding justice we recognize (or at least consider) that the very notion of justice—indeed the gamut of political and cognitive elements that constitute formal, multiracial democratic practices and institutions—produces or requires black exclusion and death as normative?

To think about Trayvon Martin's death not merely as a tragedy or media controversy but as a political marker of possibilities permits one to come to terms with several foundational and foretold stories, particularly if we understand that death or killing to be prefigured by mass or collective loss of social standing and life. One story is of impossible redemption

in the impossible polis. It departs from, and depends on, the position of the hegemonic, anti-black—which is not exclusively white but is exclusively non-black—subject and the political and cognitive schemes that guarantee her ontology and genealogy. Depending on the theology, redemption requires deliverance from sin, and/or deliverance from slavery.<sup>1</sup> Redemption is a precondition of integration into the white-dominated social universe.<sup>2</sup> Integration thus requires that the black become a non-slave, and that the black become a non-sinner. The paradox or impossibility is that if blackness is both sin and sign of enslavement, the mark of “Ham,” then despite the legal abolition of juridical enslavement or chattel slavery or the end of the formal colony, the sinner and enslaved endure; and virtue requires the eradication of both.

If we theorize from the standpoint say of Frantz Fanon, through the lens of the fiftieth anniversary of the English publication *The Wretched of the Earth* (or Ida B. Wells’s *Southern Horrors*, Toni Morrison’s *Playing in the Dark*, Frank Wilderson’s *Incognegro*, etc.), we can follow a clear heuristic formulation: from the perspective of the dominant, white-inflected gaze and predisposition, blacks can be redeemed neither from sin nor from slavery.<sup>3</sup> For a black person to be integrated, s/he must either become non-black, or display superhuman and/or inhuman qualities. (In Fanonian terms she would become an aggrandized slave or enfranchised slave—that is, one who owns property still nonetheless remains in servitude or colonized.)

The imagination, mechanics, and reproduction of the ordinary polis rely on the exclusion of ordinary blacks and their availability for violent aggression and/ or premature death or disappearance (historically through lynching and the convict prison lease system, today through “benign neglect” and mass incarceration). The ordinary black person can therefore never be integrated. The “ordinary negro” is never without sin. Thus, to be sinless or angelic in order to be recognized as citizenry has been the charge for postbellum blackness.

Throughout the twentieth century, movements to free blacks from what followed in the wake of the abolition of chattel slavery ushered in the postbellum black cyborg: the call for a “Talented Tenth” issued by white missionaries and echoed by a young W. E. B. Du Bois, Bayard Rustin’s imploring a young Martin Luther King Jr. to become “angelic” in his advocacy of civil rights and to remove the men with shotguns from his front porch despite the bombings and death threats against King, his wife Coretta, and their young children. The angelic negro/negress is not representative, and his or her status as an acceptable marker for U.S. democracy is predicated upon their usefulness for the transformation of whiteness into a loftier, more ennobled formation. This performance or service of the angelic black would be resurrected in the reconstruction of Trayvon Martin as a youth worthy of the right to life, the right of refusal to wear blackness as victimization; the right to fight back. That is, the

right to the life of the polis; so much of black life, particularly for the average fellah, is mired in close proximity to the graveyard, hemmed in by the materiality of social margins and decay, exclusion and violence.

A cursory look at transgenerational transmission of occupational status and wealth suggests that, relative to whites, blacks a) remain disproportionately trapped in lower-status occupations, b) move out of such positions with greater difficulty, and c) once upwardly mobile, fall back into lower-status occupations at greater and faster rates. Cases of random violence, police brutality, AIDS/HIV infection, and death by preventable disease reaffirm the impossible integration. They also suggest mechanics of social reproduction that regenerate non-black life while producing black death. In 1951 the Civil Rights Congress petitioned the United Nations in their book-length document, "We Charge Genocide,"<sup>4</sup> to respond to the fact that the United States not only failed to protect black people from the violent impact of racial violence in civil society but also enacted and enabled racist violence. In other proto-empires of the black diaspora, allegedly where anti-blackness is not as blatant as in the United States, mothers mobilize against the continued victimizations of their sons by the state and its deputized actors. For example, in Brazil, the list of Trayvons is extensive and increasing.<sup>5</sup> The globe shares with the United States a phobic response to blackness, intensified by the added "threat" of the predatory young. Black children, including the preborn and the deceased, have no vulnerability which the polis or police need to respect. In his 2005 syndicated talk show, Reagan administration Secretary of Education William Bennett stated that to prevent or diminish crime in the United States would require aborting all black babies (Bennett referred to no other racial demographic and did add, likely recognizing a proximity to the Fuhrer, that this would be unethical and impractical).<sup>6</sup> The text of blackness as evil destined for eradication is written and read by teachers of sorts to children of all kinds.

The public discussion or debate about Trayvon's photographs, the "accuracy" of their depictions of the youth, tells another story of impossible redemption. The initial photographs of Trayvon used by the news media show him smiling, in football uniform, in ski gear, holding a child (supposedly nine days before his was killed), and wearing a hoodie,<sup>7</sup> which was used widely on protest banners.<sup>8</sup> Other images widely circulated on the Internet were from Trayvon's 2011 and 2012 Twitter account. They depict him tattooed, bruised on his shoulder, and showing his middle finger; in another picture, he is smiling, gold-toothed.<sup>9</sup>

These latter photographs accompanied news pieces about Trayvon's alleged troubles in school and with law enforcement, although he had never been arrested. With these photographs came the assumption that, because they were taken more recently, they therefore provided a more accurate description of the Trayvon that died on February 26, 2012. Trayvon had been suspended from school three times during his last school

year. As thousands of people gathered throughout the United States to demand Zimmerman's arrest, reports surfaced that, in October 2012, a school police investigator had spotted Trayvon defacing lockers with the "W.T.F." The next day, the officer searched his book bag, finding jewelry, a screwdriver (which the officer described as a "burglary tool"); and a baggie with traces of marijuana.<sup>10</sup>

Contrasting the "younger" and "older" Trayvons brings us to a space of impossible redemption. Trayvon can only be unmistakably innocent if he is angelic. To be angelical is to be supernatural or infantile; to not grow up, to not have autonomous agency, to not reach puberty, to never rebel against authority (which by definition is restrictive even if it is for one's "own good"). When inflected by blackness, the gendered aspects of Trayvon's alleged "later," and therefore "truer," pictures, make it impossible for him not be threatening. The lethal violence George Zimmerman inflicted on Trayvon Martin—the symbolic and material violence routinized to black bodies—is a preemptive measure against what is assumed the black would do if not repressed.<sup>11</sup> The discourse legitimizing this violence proliferated with the appearance of the "free black" following the civil war.

Echoing postbellum discourse, Zimmerman's father recounts the struggle preceding the shooting, when George and Trayvon were wrestling on the ground: "George believes Trayvon saw [George's] pistol, was going to get it, and said, 'You are going to die tonight.' Shortly after that, George drew the pistol and shot him."<sup>12</sup> Trayvon was shot to prevent him from shooting George.<sup>13</sup> These stories are part of the lore and common sense of the nation. On the west coast, police testify that Rodney King was brutalized so that King would not brutalize the police officers.<sup>14</sup> In the south, apartheid exonerates fourteen-year-old Emmett Till's abduction, torture, and murder so as to kill the black imagining of desire or mocking of desire for sexual intimacy with a white female, the only unforgivable sin.

In Trayvon's foretold tragedy, even though a case could be made that the "truer" photos appeared after the "older" innocence-inspiring photos, the "older" photos are ultimately the default references, the al-ways, already overdetermining symbolic parameter. It is against the menacing images that even the "innocent-looking" Trayvon attains symbolic valence. The image of the black child is always already framed by the image of the menacing black. "Look, a Negro [Negress]!" scrambles time as it defines a field of vision where the black subject is the permanent object of preemptive, supposedly cleansing, regenerative violence.<sup>15</sup> That Fanon notes that this is the white child's cry to its parental, protective figure in the face of Frantz Fanon's appearance as and only as a black, not a man, not a human, suggests that whites are infantilized in the presence of blackness and require the protection of the state or its depu-

tized citizenry, who are understood to legitimately safeguard themselves with excessive force.

Everyone seems to agree upon this "strategy" for redemption. That Trayvon's supporters attempt to portray him as an innocent victim suggests how compelling narratives of integration and colorblindness are. Such narratives fail to acknowledge, and ultimately reproduce, intrinsic anti-blackness. Anti-blackness depends on an impossible time that has no beginning because it has no end. Age in Trayvon's ordeal is as immaterial as it was in the 1958 North Carolina "kissing case," when seven-year-old David Simpson and nine-year-old James Hanover Thompson were arrested after a white girl allegedly kissed Thompson on the cheek.<sup>16</sup> It is immaterial in Bennett's call, as a conservative who opposes abortion, for genocidal violence against all black wombs. It is terrifying to hear the clock ticking as your black child grows up. So, many might mute the sounds. The sounds become increasingly unbearable if one recognizes that the parent hears not a countdown (to puberty and maturation) but to interment.

This is the heightened perceived threat and the impossible time, and therefore impossible space, of blackness in an anti-black world. Like all black children, Trayvon lived on borrowed, impossible time. The time is borrowed because as soon as the presumed innocence is over, their time as a sin-free, threat-free person ends. (One should also consider, as the editors of this volume argue, that this "presumed innocence" functions as a probation period: "Think Bennett"—even the toddler, infant, preborn are criminalized.) This is impossible because this time is not linear, it is not chronological; it is ontological.

The Fanonian self-interrogation prescribed for the native or colonized intellectual mutates into parental torture when one considers child vulnerability to colonizing and enslaving violence. When, you ask, will your black child be brutalized? It is a rhetorical query. Recall other stories of violation: When she or he complain that her teacher or daycare person does not like her, or does not touch her? When your six-year-old is accused of sexually molesting the white girl in the opposing basketball team? When your four-year-old comes back home saying that she's been called a "black monkey"?

It was, is now, and will always be so under white supremacy. In the past, present, future, blackness as evil in a white democracy can't be "victimized"; it is only vanquished. Trayvon's death is foretold; it is constitutive of the black child's impossible experience of growing up as a fully legitimate, entitled, protected, member of the polis. To experience one's child's death, by increments, while she lives, is to be confronted with the terror-laden unique condition of blackness, a condition that negates the expected genealogical time. So, Trayvon's death, accidental killing, murder, or lynching, as a media spectacle and opportunity for civil rights mobilization functions as distraction.

## MAPPING THE BOUNDARIES OF PROGRESSIVISM

Many stories of redemption from white racism or colonization announce a black cyborg: a modified, improved human whose increased ethical, spiritual, and physical capabilities generate unusual strength, omniscience, and boundless love. In this narrative, the black cyborg is a "creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction. Social reality is lived social relations, our most important social construction, a world-changing fiction."<sup>17</sup> The artist and activist James Baldwin offers an illustration.

Writing to his nephew James (interchangeable with Trayvon, Emmett, Juan<sup>18</sup>) on the one hundredth anniversary of the emancipation, James Baldwin describes U.S. antiblack logic of social relations in spatial arrangements and life chances:

This innocent country set you down in a ghetto in which, in fact, it intended that you should perish. Let me spell out precisely what I mean by that, for the heart of the matter is here, and the root of my dispute with my country. You were born where you were born and faced the future that you faced because you were black, and *for no other reason*. The limits of your ambition were, thus, expected to be set forever. You were born into a society which spelled out with brutal clarity, and in as many ways as possible, that you were a worthless human being.<sup>19</sup>

This collective experience is a fact as much as it is a product of the foundational fiction from which antiblackness springs. An immanently political being, compelled into a force field that negates his and her existence, the black cyborg is able to overcome the brutality of imposed limits—the conditions of social and physical death. How so? The black cyborg refuses victimization by narrating a political desire, offered in an unproblematic fashion: the necessity and possibility of integration.<sup>20</sup> The cyborg's erotic<sup>21</sup> impulses happen as if projects of black autonomy never surfaced.<sup>22</sup> In this regard, Baldwin's storyline relies on a reduced black political field which, therefore, is fictive.<sup>23</sup> Baldwin's cyborg breathes this engineered atmosphere. In this rarefied and terrible war theater, Baldwin instructs James, using the model of the civil rights cyborg as the prototype for progress. In order to salvage integration, it is necessary

that we [blacks], with love, shall force our [white] brothers to see themselves as they are, to cease fleeing from reality and begin to change it. For this is our home, my friend, do not be driven from it; great men have done great things here, and will again, and we can make America what America must become. It will be hard, James, but you come from sturdy, peasant stock, men who picked cotton and dammed rivers and built railroads, and, in the teeth of the most terrifying odds, achieved an unassailable and monumental dignity.<sup>24</sup>

Baldwin's language is one of redemption through love and struggle. Who redeems, who loves, who rescues the country from its perverse appropriation? The black cyborg or moral agent, endowed with dignity without analog, redeems whites whose symbolic and social universe depends on the anti-person, the black. While there are instructive parallels between Baldwin's and Fanon's mapping of the white ontological field,<sup>25</sup> such parallels do not produce analog scenarios of resolution.<sup>26</sup> Fanon wants to start anew by having the native or fellah replace the colonialist: "The last will be first" is the mandate. Fanon seeks the end of the colony, and it will be a violent one, enabling the birth of the nation. Baldwin though wants to recuperate a project, vision, idea: "I love America more than any other country in the world, and, exactly for this reason, I insist on the right to criticize her perpetually."<sup>27</sup> Baldwin's country is salvageable because he loves it. Fanon's is not, and it is hate that leads to transformation, not love, in *The Wretched of the Earth*. Baldwin's civil rights actor is not Fanon's rebel, nor is the young man who tells a puzzled Martin Luther King Jr. as he walks through a charred Watts in 1965: "We won because we made them pay attention to us."<sup>28</sup> These words appear to echo the stance of the black three-year-old fighting her white Latina "principal" who was attempting to shame her. It may seem infantile until one considers that youth understand the dynamics of power and power relations. They can momentarily derail the machinery of their/our incarceration. Baldwin's country is salvageable if the machine proceeds and the new product is the redeemed white and black. Both cleansed from the stains of racial supremacy. For the street rebels, and the disciplined revolutionaries, to throw a wrench into the machinery, to be recognized with any form of agency, is a form of morality and ethics.

Civil Rights progressivism is problematic because it cannot adapt or adjust to the realities of structural antiblack brutality and the tactics used against it by non-Angelic black cyborgs. Anti-black terror is to be rendered visible, unacceptable, and thus neutralized by blacks' embracing of whites, as Baldwin reminds us: "You must accept them and accept them with love. For these innocent people have no other hope. They are, in effect, still trapped in a history which they do not understand; and until they understand it, they cannot be released from it."<sup>29</sup> The burden of acceptance, as that of reason, communicative initiative, and ethical commitment—the burden of integration—is squarely on blacks: black intellect, psyche, body, imagination. Baldwin's vision configures and requires a black cyborg as victim, as without rage; a superhuman with unnatural capacities to suffer and love.

Part of the broad appeal, and ultimate ineffectiveness, of organizing around cases of lethal violence against blacks in the United States (and in the black diaspora) is the seemingly ever-renewed will to believe in a social organization, its institutions and people, as if they were not intrinsically anti-black, possessed no racial logic that held its own in consistent-



cy despite actions that are affirmative or laws that are civil rights oriented or blacks that are police chiefs, mayors, CEOs, governors, or presidents. A genocidal logic cannot be altered or remedied without the erasure of both parties, the colonizer and the colonized. Without the disappearance of blackness as "evil" or "sin" and whiteness as "value" or "virtue" there is no fundamental change. Without the supernatural ability of non-blacks to love back, to love black, the utopian black cyborg, the one with a decades old or centuries old love affair with a white mistress/master cannot refuse victimization, she can only redefine it.

The construction of black cyborgs—those who believe, endure, wait, and forgive against all odds and historical evidence—is appealing but ultimately ineffective.<sup>30</sup>

On April 23, 2012, Zimmerman was released on a \$150,000 bail.<sup>31</sup> Public protests have mostly stopped. In May 2012, George Zimmerman was charged by a special prosecutor with second-degree murder, which carries the possible sentence of life in prison.<sup>32</sup> The current wait is pregnant with redemption. It's either a difficult birth, that requires Baldwin's civil rights cyborg to forgive, believe, and love; or an impossible birth, another killing unaccounted for, unaccountable, that reproduces the nation by leaving intact the premises and the conditions of black death—the very premises and conditions Baldwin describes to this young nephew.

## REDEMPTION AND THE BLACK CYBORGS

Blacks do not easily, publicly embrace the concept of self-defense. Perhaps this embrace makes them feel more vulnerable to violence and censorship. Perhaps it challenges the constitution of the all-loving black cyborg who demonstrates "superiority" by their capacity to love haters?<sup>33</sup> Self-defense does not refuse victimization by assisting the oppressor into a fuller humanity; rather it garners the resources to diminish the impact of oppression on black life, independent of whether or not the colonialist or enslaver wants to be emotionally embraced by the black and recognized as kin rather than as superior.

Baldwin's civil rights cyborg is only one manifestation of a black cyborg. There are black revolutionaries as cyborgs who have little hope for Western democracy's ability to embrace black life. Their reflections from prison, exile, the grave reveal a rebel who relinquishes the unachievable goal: striving for a socially recognized "humanity" that is constructed on the antithesis resting on her hip. For European wealth and Western democracy's leisured consumerism were enabled by colonization and slavery, birthed through the black body.

The democracy that Baldwin seeks to heroically rescue cannot be resuscitated as anything other than a site in which black death and the vulnerability of black children to emotional, psychological, physical trauma

ma continue to exist. At times rather than manifested as a direct assault one sees racist oppression as a by-product: in Fanon's language, what the "nigger" within and among us inflicts on other blacks, raging against captivity and humiliation but feeling powerless to attack the true assailant.

Part divine, part mechanical, part biological, black rebel cyborgs demand not democracy but freedom. They do not view the emergence of the nation-state from the ash of the colony (ghetto) burning down as the consummate victory. On a trajectory beyond Baldwin, and Fanon, they exist outside of humanity that fabricates time and measures freedom and enslavement by teaspoons or Tazers. Black cyborgs who relinquish claims to the nation-state become, like the namesake of Toni Morrison's *The Song of Solomon*, capable of movements that inspire flight.

Not all black cyborgs are created equal nor do they all desire the same objectives. Some endowed with the superhuman powers of governmental or corporate entities reproduce existing structures with modifications. Some demand not to be ensnared or in complicity with an empire based on genocide. Cyborgs who reject the definition of democracy as freedom will struggle against the polis and those blacks who insist that no real social or political life exists outside the polis. This "battle of the black cyborgs" reveals a diversity of opponents influenced by civil rights liberalism or revolutionary nationalism. Such battles might be dismissed as a distracting sideshow, a cheesy entertainment spectacle of fixed wrestling replete with commercial breaks. Yet the gravity of Trayvon Martin's last wrestle with his opponent, the "mortal combat" against an enemy backed by white supremacy's judicial, police, and media machineries, is a compelling story, one about a youth who refused blackness-as-victimization, without any guarantee of redemption.

#### ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Thank you to Stephen Marshall for bringing James Baldwin into this conversation.

#### NOTES

1. In some forms of Buddhism, redemption is the release from worldly desires. The discussion of the black cyborg as anti-materialist but not anti-nature will require another article.

2. Integration as codified in the civil rights movement's political and legal discourse relies on specific convergence of interests. Richard Delgado, Derrick Bell, and other critical race theorists have analyzed the lack of substantive convergence of interests between the victims of white supremacy and the beneficiaries. Black nationalist projects as liberatory interventions have been contained or crowded out by the civil rights legacy.

3. Studies in social psychology have demonstrated the implicit knowledge that links images of blacks to images of apes, and vice versa; and posit that on a cognitive level, a structural connection has been forged between blackness and the state of nature or animality. See works by Phillip Abita Goff, who contributes a chapter to this volume. Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth* notes how the colonialist has linked colonized peoples with the bestiary, in order to justify European imperialism. Only humans, not animals, can atone for sin and transcend natural inclinations, worthy of civic participation.

4. William Patterson et al., "We Charge Genocide: The Crime of Government Against the Negro People," petition presented to the United Nations, 1951.

5. Luciane Rocha and Jaime Alves have critiqued campaigns, committees, events, and government-supported initiatives that target the genocide of Brazilian black youth. The Black Women's Institute Geledés' position articulates the shared understanding among mobilized blacks: "The Genocide of Black Youth: Dictatorship Doctrine and Racism continue strong in public safety": <http://www.geledes.org.br/areas-de-atuacao/questao-racial/violencia-racial/11495-genocidio-da-juventude-negra-doutrina-da-ditadura-e-racismo-continua-firme-e-forte-nas-forcas-de-seguranca>, accessed on May 17, 2012.

6. Similarly, Rio de Janeiro state governor Sergio Cabral recently said that favela women's birth rates must be lowered as they are "factories producing criminals."

7. Trayvon Martin's death was not predicated on behavior or attire. Mark Zuckerberg offended investors by wearing a hoodie to his meeting to discuss taking Facebook public, but the offense was not sinful nor was it evil; his whiteness and wealth permit him personality and temperament if they are read as "difficult" or "boorish."

8. <http://www.theatlantic.com/national/archive/2012/03/on-the-age-and-innocence-of-trayvon-martin/255293/>, accessed May 17, 2012.

9. <http://dailycaller.com/2012/03/29/second-trayvon-martin-twitter-feed-identified>, accessed May 17, 2012.

10. [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/02/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-prompts-a-review-of-ideals.html?\\_r=3&hp=&pagewanted=all](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/02/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-prompts-a-review-of-ideals.html?_r=3&hp=&pagewanted=all), accessed May 17, 2012; <http://www.miamiherald.com/2012/03/26/2714778/thousands-expected-at-trayvon.html>, accessed May 17, 2012.

11. See Robert Gooding-Williams, *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* (New York: Routledge, 1993).

12. "Race, Tragedy and Outrage Collide after a Shot in Florida," [http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/02/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-prompts-a-review-of-ideals.html?\\_r=1&pagewanted=6&ref=media](http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/02/us/trayvon-martin-shooting-prompts-a-review-of-ideals.html?_r=1&pagewanted=6&ref=media), accessed May 18, 2012.

13. When he pursued, struggled with, and killed Trayvon Martin, George Zimmerman was a "neighborhood captain." The curious-sounding occupation and military terminology resonates with "capitão do mato," or "bush captain." In Brazil, the bush captain was in charge of recapturing runaway enslaved blacks. In similar fashion, Zimmerman was deputized and empowered.

14. Judith Butler, "Endangered/Endangering: Schematic Racism and White Paranoia," in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising*, ed. Robert Gooding-Williams (New York: Routledge, 1993), 15–22.

15. Frantz Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, chapter 5.

16. See Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).

17. Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto: Science, Technology, and Socialist-Feminism in the Late 20th Century," in *The International Handbook of Virtual Learning Environments*, eds. J. Weiss et al. (Dordrecht: Springer, 2006), 117–58.

18. See the case of eleven-year-old Juan Morales, a black child killed by police in Rio in June 2011, <http://g1.globo.com/rio-de-janeiro/noticia/2011/09/mp-rj-denuncia-pms-suspeitos-no-caso-juan-por-dois-homicidios.html>, accessed May 18, 2012.

19. James Baldwin, "My Dungeon Shook: Letter to My Nephew on the One Hundredth Anniversary of the Emancipation," in *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, ed. Toni Morrison (New York: Library of America, 1998), 293.

20. Of the endeavors of the cyborg and the demarcation lines, Donna Haraway writes: "This is a struggle over life and death, but the boundary between science fiction and social reality is an optical illusion" (Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," 117).

21. Erotic is understood as a constellation of desires that engage the political, affective, creative. Audre Lorde distinguishes the erotic from the pornographic defined as domination-based and destructive of intimacy (Audre Lorde, *Sister Outsider* [1984]).

22. Black nationalist projects were ultimately defeated by integrationist/middle-class/legalist fronts. See Derrick Bell, "Serving Two Masters: Integration Ideals and Client Interest in School Desegregation Litigation," in *Critical Race Theory: The Key Writings that Formed the Movement*, eds. Kimberlé Crenshaw et al. (New York: The New Press, 1995), 5–19.

23. For useful typologies of black political thought, see Joy James, *Shadowboxing: Representations of Black Feminist Politics* (New York: Palgrave, 1999); and Michael Dawson, *Black Visions: The Roots of Contemporary African-American Political Ideologies* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2003).

24. James Baldwin, "My Dungeon Shook," *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 294.

25. Regarding the symbolic dependence that whites have on blacks, and what happens when blacks, by negating their imposed inferiority, endanger white's identity, Baldwin states: "Well, the black man has functioned in the white man's world as a fixed star, as an immovable pillar: and as he moves out of his place, heaven and earth are shaken to their foundations" (294).

26. Although Frantz Fanon does state that "today I believe in love," his political views do not consider integration as a viable goal or even strategy. See Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, a text with marked differences from *The Wretched of the Earth*, which was a response to a guerilla war of independence between Algeria and France.

27. James Baldwin, "Autobiographical Notes," *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 9.

28. Lance Hill, *The Deacons for Defense: Armed Resistance and the Civil Rights Movement* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2006), 235.

29. James Baldwin, "My Dungeon Shook," *James Baldwin: Collected Essays*, 293–94.

30. The time elapsed between Rodney King's videotaped brutalization on March 3, 1991, and the beginning of the April 29, 1992, Los Angeles uprising following the not-guilty verdicts given to the police officers involved in the beating suggests a period of hope when justice is given another chance. (That the rioters against state and property included whites and Latinos as well as blacks suggests the possibility of kinship with black rebels.) The wait allows for redemption through the hope that police misconduct will be addressed and punished through the courts. The disappointment following that wait was massive. As South Central Los Angeles fires burned, Rodney King asked "Why can't we all just get along?" His televised address for tolerance targeted those "making it horrible for the older people and the kids." Unsurprisingly, this appeal converged with the dominant new media's misrepresentation of the rebellion that suggested black youths were the principal actors. It was carried out exclusively by black youth; whites and Latinos had only chosen to take matters in their own hands, employing violence as an implement.

31. Matt Flegenheimer, "George Zimmerman Released after Posting Bail," *New York Times* (April 23, 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/24/us/george-zimmerman-released-after-posting-bail-in-trayvon-martin-case.html>, accessed May 18, 2012.

32. Lizette Alvarez and Michael Cooper, "Prosecutor Files Charges of 2nd-Degree Murder in Shooting of Martin," *New York Times* (April 11, 2012), <http://www.nytimes.com/2012/04/12/us/zimmerman-to-be-charged-in-trayvon-martin-shooting.html?pagewanted=all>, accessed May 18, 2012.

33. In *Black Marxism*, Cedric Robinson suggests that enslaved blacks successful in overthrowing whites seldom used the brutal terror that whites employed on them. This narrative, though not identical to Baldwin's black cyborg, feeds the imagination of the unusually endowed black subject of monumental psychic, ethical, and physical qualities.