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What Does It Mean to Move for Black Lives?

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Abstract:

I argue that the key ideas of the movement for Black lives have resonances with Frantz Fanon's ideas particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks*. I first demonstrate how the mission to repudiate Black demise and affirm Black humanity captures Fanon's critique of universal humanism. The fear of the Black body was central to the testimonies of Darren Wilson, Jeronimo Yanez, and George Zimmerman (the individuals that shot and killed Mike Brown, Philando Castile, and Trayvon Martin respectively). Fanon prioritized the role of the body in his account of racism. It is difficult to not see the relevance of Fanon's analysis when one considers these testimonies. Lastly, I demonstrate how the chants "Black lives matter," "Hands up, don't shoot," and "I can't breathe" are acknowledgments of the significance of Black lives and serve as contemporary instances of Fanon's sociodiagnostic approach.

Key words:

Afro-Pessimism, Black Lives Matter, Fanon, humanism

The ideas that inspired the movement for Black lives have been narrowly traced through African-American political thought. However, the ideas of the movement have resonances with Black radical political thought more generally. I argue that the key ideas of the movement have resonances with Frantz Fanon's ideas particularly in *Black Skin, White Masks*. Patrisse Cullors, Alicia Garza, and Opal Tometi claim that the mission of the movement is to influence global change where "Black lives are no longer systematically targeted for demise," and to affirm Black humanity.¹ The "call for Black lives to matter is a rallying cry for ALL Black lives striving for liberation."² While these are not the only ideas of the movement, they represent the basic impetus of the movement. I connect these ideas to three Fanonian ideas: his critique of universal humanism, the centrality of the body for affectively over-determined racial relations, and his introduction of "sociodiagnostics" to understand the effects of racism.³

I first demonstrate how the mission to repudiate Black demise and affirm Black humanity captures Fanon's critique of universal humanism. One can observe this in the backlash the movement has received with regard to "all lives matter" and "blue lives matter" The fear of the Black body was central to the testimonies of Darren Wilson, Jeronimo Yanez, and George Zimmerman (the individuals who shot and killed Mike Brown, Philando Castile, and Trayvon Martin, respectively). Fanon prioritized the role of the body in his account of racism. It is difficult to not see the relevance of Fanon's analysis when one considers these three testimonies. Lastly, I demonstrate how the chants "Black lives matter" "Hands up, don't shoot" and "I can't breathe" are acknowledgments of the significance of Black lives and serve as contemporary instances of Fanon's sociodiagnostic approach. What, then, does it mean to move for Black lives? Fanon's sociodiagnostic approach gives us one important answer to this question. The movement for Black lives is a representation of the necessity for a new humanism. It is to search out a different humanism.

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The impetus for the emergence of the movement for Black lives was the aftermath of George Zimmerman's acquittal in the murder trial of Trayvon Martin in 2012. By December 2014, the uprising in Ferguson, Missouri, over the shooting of Mike Brown had been transformed into a national movement against police violence and anti-Black racism. To repeat, the stated mission of the movement is to repudiate Black demise and affirm Black humanity. This mission captures Fanon's critique of universal humanism on both accounts. The ongoing killing and brutal treatment of Black people by law enforcement in the United States is (in part) what is meant by the repudiation of Black demise. Yet, this part of the mission also concerns the current unintelligibility of Black people to theory. It is not just the case, as Lewis R. Gordon claims, that Black thought matters, but also the particular experiences of Black people need to be discerned, understood, and articulated in our theories. The second aspect of the mission (to affirm Black humanity) is my largest motivation for considering Fanon's ideas in this context. Fanon pays attention to the ontological structures that over-determine Black being. However, this is only one aspect of Fanon's theory. The ignored aspect of Fanon's theory is his call for "a new humanism"⁴ Fanon is a thinker that affirms Black humanity. This affirmation is the basic project of *Black Skin, White Masks*, which is captured by its title: to help Black people understand the necessity for self-determination.

Fanon is a deeply misunderstood thinker. Even Martin Luther King Jr. failed to grasp Fanon's message.⁵ The contemporary intellectual movement known as Afro-Pessimism has inadvertently made Fanon into a despondent character. AfroPessimism is a framework that describes the ongoing effects of racism, colonialism, and enslavement, and their impact on both structural conditions and subjective reality.⁶ Fanon's attention to the ontological structures that over-determine Black being is foundational to the framework. Afro-Pessimism has been constructed in many ways and with different aims; however, it is not a cynical political attitude in the sense that the term "pessimism" implies. The framework is used to articulate the repertoire of abjection in response to anti-Black racism, global white supremacy, colonialism, imperialism, and slavery. Dismantling anti-Black racism and global white supremacy, which are the foundation of Black suffering, would require the destruction of many of our current social and political institutions. The movement for Black lives, however, manages to do more than launch a critique that illuminates Black abjection. It affirms Black humanity, which, I think, puts pressure on the Afro-Pessimistic reading of Fanon. *Black Skin, White Masks* concerns not only providing a diagnosis, but it boldly implies that the cure for removing this cloak of whiteness, which conceals Black humanity, requires one to first understand the pervasiveness of the problem.

There are two major studies on the movement for Black lives.⁷ Their tendency is to trace the contemporary political struggle against anti-Black racism through African-American political thought and rely on the usual suspects: Frederick Douglass, King, and James Baldwin. The upshot of these studies is they demonstrate that the idea that Black lives matter is not new. Yet, they also show why the idea that Black people are human has required continuous repetition. Black people been characterized as unintelligent, uncivilized animals by several of the revered philosophers in the Western tradition.⁸ Contemporary scholars of these philosophers often choose to ignore these ugly aspects of their otherwise "universal" and "objective" philosophies. If not this, then the plight of Black people is blatantly ignored.⁹ Philosophers have now come consider the movement for Black lives but these reflections are shot through with attempts to maintain disciplinary decadence. To these philosophers, Fanon is not a philosopher. To concern myself with Black life is not proper philosophical content and the question I pose in the title of this essay is not a philosophical one.

The term "humanism" has a transient meaning, especially where modern languages are concerned. There is perhaps no one definitive way to understand the term and it is difficult to approach it with any precision.¹⁰ "Humanism" comes from the Latin *humanus*, which comes from *homo* meaning man. There are many aspects of human nature and all of them deserve to be called human but analyzing all its aspects, given the lexical roots of the term alone is beyond the scope of this project.¹¹ Yet, I mention this complexity now to make it clear that I recognize that humanism is an imprecise topic to nail down. It is worth stating that the term first appeared around 1836 in France and related to the humanities, literary culture, in particular. The first philosopher to use the term "humanism" in English was Ferdinand Canning Scott Schiller in 1905. Schiller defines humanism as follows: humanism is merely the perception that the philosophic problem concerns human beings striving to comprehend a world of human experience by the resources of the human mind.¹² This definition relies on the German understanding of the term, which took humanism to be the revival of ancient Greek culture.¹³ Although the German meaning is not the only meaning of the term, it clearly has infected the English use of the term. An uncomfortable universalism is inherent in humanism since the erudite Greek male is taken to be an exemplar of the human.

Fanon critiques several iterations of humanism: socialist humanism, psychoanalytic humanism, and (what one might call) Hegelian humanism or dialectical humanism. Understanding these critiques clarifies Fanon's words: "Running the risk of angering my black brothers, I shall say that a Black is not a man"¹⁴ Socialist humanism is, of course, one of the results of Karl Marx's thought. Marx maintains that men make their own history.¹⁵ The real achievement of socialist humanism is its declaration that the human cannot be separated from praxis, that is, knowledge is action. Fanon borrows this idea, when he quotes Marx on social revolution.¹⁶ Fanon criticizes Jean-Paul Sartre's suggestion that the Négritude movement was only a temporary moment because race-consciousness should be subjugated to class-consciousness in "Black Orpheus."¹⁷ Thus, socialist humanism, as articulated by Sartre, emphasizes class-consciousness. Then, there is Fanon's concern about psychoanalytic humanism, which is the result of Sigmund Freud's thought, especially as he advances his theory of the Oedipus Complex and his view that all manifestations of psychosis are the result of an identifiable trauma.¹⁸ The notion that one can understand why the Black man acts as he does by considering his sexual desire and the idea that there is an identifiable wound that can explain his psychosis is inadequate since, according to Fanon, the Black subject has no childhood and sexual desire is over-determined by race. Finally, Fanon's criticism of Hegelian humanism is its intimation that mutual recognition is a possibility in a world where race over-determines social interactions. While Hegelian humanism is not as obvious as socialist humanism and psychoanalytic humanism, Hegel might be viewed as the universal humanist par excellence with his subjectivism. Subjectivity, for Hegel, is the process of self-consciousness reaching outwards and discovering itself in the environment and in the cultural and ethical life of society, which of course for Hegel constitutes the truth of spirit. To be clear, Fanon's main criticism is that Black people do not matter to these conceptions of man (not in how race consciousness functions, not in how race functions in or shapes their psychological processes and complexes, and not in their attempts to constitute themselves). These conceptions cannot account for the precariousness of Black life.

The message "Black lives matter" flirts with misunderstanding, especially since it is misheard as "only Black lives matter" The reaction to this misunderstanding has been "all lives matter" and the even larger miscalculation "blue lives matter" However, the affirmation of Black humanity is not necessarily a call for a Black humanism but it certainly intimates Fanon's call for a new humanism. Angela Y. Davis alludes to the connection between universal humanism and the movement, when she refers to the movement as "a surer path to the universal, to a more inclusive universal"¹⁹ The movement represents a more reliable way to the universal conception of the human than ways that characterize the Western philosophical tradition in the past. These ways have notoriously marginalized and excluded people of color. Davis does not repudiate the notion of the universal but she offers a perhaps different way to achieve a conception that not only includes but centers Black people.²⁰ A conception where Black people are not the border for that which is human is demarcated. The message "Black lives matter" is a clear indictment to anyone claiming to be a philosopher or purporting to do theory because it engages the most central inquiry: being.

Despite its messiness and complexity, the question of the human is unavoidable because inspecting the ontic incomprehensibility of Black subjectivity is precisely what the movement confronts. There are different (and more popular ways honestly) to think about the issues that lead to Black demise. Implicit bias is the more popular name for implicit social cognition research. Implicit bias refers to the positive and negative attitudes and stereotypes that affects our unconscious understanding, action, and

decision making. This model has gained a lot of traction, since it claims to have some measurability through the implicit association test, but the test has little or no replicability making it unclear how to interpret its results. There are problems with the paradigm itself. The most concerning one is that it has no story to tell about how unconscious biases end up translating into deadly action. How did George Zimmerman go from profiling Trayvon Martin to shooting him? The result is that we have a ton of data claiming that bias is pervasive. The research has no story to tell about how racial profiling morphed into the deaths of Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, or Philando Castile and countless others but it goes to pains to emphasize that Black people are biased themselves.²¹ Second, the legal recourse route for the harassment and murder of Black people has its limits. I have trouble relying on a legal system that not only operates on legal precedent and uses suspicious methods for jury selection, but also considered Black people one third of a person not too long ago. When *Brown v. Board of Education* ruled that racial segregation in public schools was unconstitutional, desegregation required enforcement. The legal opinion of court alone was not sufficient for ending segregation. There were never any convictions for the murder and brutalization of Black people. Third, the focus on policy reform as a means for ending Black demise is one-dimensional. Policy reform can definitely help to correct the practices and policies that have contributed to the suffering of Black people, but it cannot be the sole focus of our analysis. Black demise occurs every time a Black person is killed and each time a philosopher adopts a theoretical paradigm that ignores and subjugates the humanity and plight of Black people. The most prevalent critique of the movement for Black lives is that it has not fostered enough targeted action and policy reform. Policy reform got us body cameras for law enforcement. Despite body cameras, Black people are still being shot. The brutal treatment, endless pursuit, and the gunfire shots that destroy Black people are caught on tape and made a public spectacle. And as you read this, Black people are still being brutalized, frisked, and shot by law enforcement. The media outlets no longer cover it. Ubiquity is the ultimate strength of anti-Black racism.²²

II

The question about whether Black kids should wear hoodies is an ethical question.²³ It is the wrong question for our analysis. There is a phenomenological experience haunting Black people and it is shaped through both socio-historical and cultural schemata.²⁴ For Fanon, the Black subject is not a subject, but an object, a phobogenic object. The phobogenic object causes white people to contradictorily fear the object and fetishize it, a condition he calls Negrophobia.²⁵ Ambivalence is the appearance of contradictory affects. One might describe it as alienation or even "social death."²⁶ However one describes this experience, what is clear is that it depends on the Black corporeality since it is the site of oppression.²⁷ The white gaze and its penetrating hatred, exotic desire, and discursive narratives direct the Black body making the Black subject contradictorily hypervisible and invisible. The white gaze results in insidious anti-Black racism and global white supremacy. It is responsible for the Black subject's inability to have a genuine relationship with the world. Fanon's diagnosis of the breakdown of inter-subjective relations is not only specific to colonial times. Fanon claims that the phobogenic object allows the white subject to constitute itself in opposition to the world by directing the super-ego's aggression outward at this phobogenic object. The result is the endemic Black condition of a feeling of inferiority and a pensive realization that Black people do not matter. The only way out of this problem is a reorganization of the process of social symbolization through "absolute violence," in which the Black subject is detoxified.²⁸

When one pays attention to the language used in the testimonies of Darren Wilson, Jeronimo Yanez, and George Zimmerman, then one sees the necessity of a corporeal analysis for understanding the message of movement for Black lives. Fanon describes a pervasive logic that renders the Black subject a phobogenic object, that is, something to be feared, beaten, maimed, whipped, shot, and lynched. Emmett Till was lynched due to the accusation of one woman's word. This is the same logic responsible for the deaths of Andrew Loku, Oscar Grant, Sherese Francis, Rekia Boyd, Kendrec McDade, Shantel Davis, Tamon Robinson, Jonathan Ferrell, McKenzie Cochran, Eric Garner, John Crawford, Tanisha Anderson, Ezell Ford, Ms Dhu, Kajieme Powell, Akai Gurley, Tamir Rice, Dontre Hamilton, Bettie Jones, Roy Nelson, Tiara Thomas, Alonzo Smith, Anthony Ashford, Tyree Crawford, Samuel Dubose, Sandra Bland, Mark Duggan, Walter Scott, Natasha McKenna, Alton Sterling, Laquan McDonald, and countless others. After all, Ms Dhu was ordered to pay her debts and died in police custody. Eric Garner was only standing on the corner. Rekia Boyd was only in a park with friends. Sean Bell was only leaving his bachelor party and anticipating his marriage the following day. Amadou Diallo was only leaving work. Their deaths, and the deaths of so many like them, demonstrate that looking Black is certainly enough to make you a suspect but sufficient to get you killed.

As Fanon's theory makes clear, having dark skin is not an elusive and intangible threat. It has real implications. Erica Garner (Eric Garner's daughter) died from a heart attack, which might be called the physicality of the heartbreak she experienced after her father's death. She was fighting against anti-Black racism. The circumstances that over-determine Black being caused her death. In an interview, she describes the weight of Blackness as follows: "I'm struggling right now with the stress and everything. This thing, it beats you down. The system beats you down to where you can't win."²⁹ Where does this stress come from? What is this thing? At the beginning of the much-obsessed-over fifth chapter of *Black Skin, White Masks*, Fanon narrates the moment of a white child spotting a Black man. The organization of this body schema leads to a feeling of responsibility. Fanon describes the sighting as an anxious moment for the child who turns to his mother for protection. It is the catalyst to a life path latent with self-hatred and riddled with anxiety for the Black man. The Black man is liable to be called upon to answer for being a social menace and invoking fear in people. This liability (we will soon see) was represented by Mike Brown's reaction to put his hands up and to mouth the words "don't shoot" He is responsible not only for invoking this fear but also for his race and his ancestors. Consequently, Fanon explains, this all leads to the Black subject becoming alienated from the body. This is why Freud got it wrong. There is no one moment that can be marked as the infliction of a wound for the Black subject. Beyond whatever you may think about the psychoanalytic or phenomenological approaches, Fanon gave us a way to think about what killed a healthy woman fighting for racial liberation. This phenomenology is the thing that beat Erica Garner down.

Darren Wilson's testimony to the grand jury about his altercation with Mike Brown sounded like fanatical fiction. Wilson told the grand jury that while on a call about a sick baby, he heard on his portable radio a report of a stealing in progress from a local store on West Florissant Avenue. He claims he did not hear the entire call but heard that the suspect was wearing a black shirt and a box of cigarillos was stolen. He claims he did not intend to respond to that call since two other officers were already responding. Wilson said that was when he noticed that a man (Brown) had cigarillos in his hand, and his accompanying friend Dorian Johnson was wearing a black shirt. Then he realized these are the two men from the stealing. From there, Wilson described himself as a man battling a non-

human monster where the only way to protect his life was: gunfire. Wilson managed to describe Brown as demon who made grunting noises. "And when I grabbed him, the only way I can describe it is I felt like a 5-year-old holding onto Hulk Hogan."³⁰ At the time of the shooting, Brown was only eighteen years old. Despite them being the same height, Wilson claims that he felt like he was being tossed around like a rag doll. The reasoning Wilson claimed he adopted was that if Brown managed to punch him in the face, then it would have killed him. Brown had superhuman strength since he was able to run through a hail of bullets. It is quite a story.

Jeronimo Yanez similarly claims he had no choice when he shot Philando Castile during a traffic stop outside of the Twin Cities. According to Yanez, Castile kept moving even though he told him not to, reaching down and putting his hand on something. Later Yanez claims he thought (imagined) he had a gun in his hand. Yanez feared for his life, he said, and the lives of his partner as well as the two passengers in the car: Castile's girlfriend (Diamond Reynolds) and her daughter. In recounting the shooting the following day, Yanez claims, "I thought I was gonna die. And, I was scared because, I didn't know if he was gonna, I didn't know what he was gonna do."³¹ He had no choice but to open fire. Castile had a license to carry a firearm; of course that made no difference to the man that decided he was a deadly threat. The idea of a Black man with a gun was sufficient to provoke this overreaction. Yanez could only conceive of Castile as a deadly threat. Even after shooting Castile, it was reported that he did not bother to check Castile's pulse. The other officers who arrived on the scene immediately comforted Yanez, that is, they did not attempt to save Castile's life.

George Zimmerman told a now famous story about the night he profiled Trayvon Martin.³² He called local law enforcement on a suspicious character wandering around the neighborhood. After being told to stand down, the watchman ignored these orders. Martin was significantly smaller in weight than Zimmerman. Despite this, Zimmerman claims that he thought (better, he imagined) that Martin had a gun. It is no wonder that pathologist Vincent Di Maio supported Zimmerman's testimony. The entire notion that Martin was vulnerable seemed to escape possibility. The 911 recording of Zimmerman spotting Martin explains why he thought it necessary to pursue him. "Zimmerman: This guy looks like he's up to no good or he's on drugs or something. It's raining and he's just walking and looking about. [00:25] 911 Dispatcher: Ok, is he White, Black, or Hispanic? Zimmerman: He looks Black."³³ At this early point in the conversation, race completely over-determines the interaction but not just on Zimmerman's end. The dispatcher explicitly introduces the question of race. The logic is one of urgency, that is, what the alleged suspect looks like determines the urgency and level of aggression with which this suspect will be pursued. Black is code for pursue with brute force.

These killings have a profound impact on Black families and communities. Sara and Aileen Mokuria's story is one about this impact. Sara Mokuria is a co-founder of Mothers Against Police Brutality (MAPB), which is an organization based out of Dallas, Texas. MAPB is "the new voice for justice for victims of police brutality and deadly force. We are multi-racial, multi-ethnic coalition uniting mothers nationwide to fight for civil rights, police accountability, and policy reform"³⁴ When Mokuria was 10 years old, she watched a police officer shoot her father, Tesfaie Mokuria. She and others across the country have been doing this work for years prior to the existence of the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter. I emphasize the intersectional aspects of the story. Sara's father was a political refugee living here in the United States and, as such, had no legal standing. The movement also transcends police killing and

brutality to the basic needs and capabilities for Black people to lead dignified lives. The movement concerns healthcare, welfare, the family, and education. It concerns the lack of access in ability to feed Black people, to shelter Black people, and to educate Black people in schools where every student has books. It means that in order for us to live in a society where all lives are valued equally, then we must pay attention to the fact that Black lives do not matter and move toward a resolution for these discrepancies.

III

The demand that Black lives be acknowledged through the use of the chant "Black lives matter" and the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter are contemporary instances of the import of Fanon's sociodiagnostic approach.³⁵ The idea that the term "sociogeny" refers to the origin and development of society is outdated. Fanon's reintroduction of the term refers to it as indicating that the origin or development of a person is the result of social factors and racial schemata. The psychoanalytic approach is indispensable to him, which is in part due to his training as a psychiatrist. Fanon writes, "Alongside phylogeny and ontogeny, there is also sociogeny. In a way, in answer to the wishes of Leconte and Damey, let us say that here is a question of a sociodiagnosics."³⁶ Fanon contrasts sociogeny with phylogeny. Phylogeny indicates that the development of a group of species is the result of evolution. He also contrasts it with ontogeny. Ontogeny is the development of a specific organism in its lifetime. Both phylogeny and ontogeny refer to processes, which is what the "-geny" in the terms denotes. The most vexing question of nineteenth-century biology was, what is the relationship between individual development (ontogeny) and the evolution of species and lineages (phylogeny)? Fanon reignites this question but he poses it as a question between the relationship between the subject and the various social institutions and their processes such as racism, colonialism, and subjugation. Thus, sociodiagnosics, for Fanon, is not concerned with the universal (like phylogeny) nor is it merely concerned with the particular (like ontogeny). Sociodiagnosics is dialectical, that is, it concerns how the universal and particular are co-constitutive. The subject is shaped by a variety of social factors. Fanon's sociodiagnosics is about the process of this shaping.

The movement for Black lives is referred to as "hashtag activism" which is to imply that it is not as significant as protesting on the streets. Some use hashtags as an easy assertion of identification with the oppressed. This is especially true in the age of the hashtag, when today's vibrant political slogan is tomorrow's cliché. This is a misguided perception. Hashtag activism occurs when large numbers of postings appear on social media under a common hashtagged phrase or sentence with a social or political claim. #BlackLivesMatter is a protest movement that happened both in the streets and on social media. The week preceding the death of Mike Brown "#Ferguson" alone appeared in millions of posts. This demonstrates that these hashtags are important cases of digital protest that have brought renewed attention to the power of digital activism in shaping public discourse and effecting public policy. "Hands up, don't shoot" and "I can't breathe" demonstrate the import of Fanon's sociodiagnostic approach due to its singular message and an attempt to bring these complex ideas into public discourse, not merely their narrative forms, but in their expansive power.

The movement for Black lives does not require a manifesto or a theoretical edifice to provide its philosophical foundation. It is not a blurry political message about injustice. Its philosophical foundation is what is in question: anti-Blackness. A text or edifice would always fail to capture the

generative absurdity of antiBlackness, which is why the chants and hashtags are rather appropriate devices to carry the message. To speak of "racial justice" is already too narrow as to distort the sentiment and nature of the movement. "Racial justice" is a last-ditch effort on the part of contemporary social and political philosophers and political theorists to make sense of the senselessness: the ongoing death, criminalization, and mass incarceration of Black people without little legal recourse.³⁷ All one wants is fairness. Where is the racial justice in a world that routinely murders, rapes, criminalizes, and incarcerates Black people? It is not an accident. The system itself generates the actors, logics, and justifications to carry out this violence. It requires this violence to sustain itself. Ask Sybrina Fulton (Trayvon Martin's mother) what she thinks about racial justice.³⁸

The "Hands up, don't shoot" message verbalizes the gesture that Mike Brown reportedly made before being shot. Again, the importance of the body is central to understanding why this rallying cry for the movement is so important. It demonstrates that Brown understood his mortality and his vulnerability and therefore could not have been a non-human monster. The "hands up" gesture is not only a wordless but a physical indictment of racial iniquities of the justice system and an assertion of inability to separate racial corporeality from Black self-determination. Typical to the backlash the movement receives, the idea that Brown might have expressed any physical vulnerability or even the idea that he did not want to lose his life were immediately called into question. When the grand jury could not confirm those testimonies, the next move was to assume that the movement itself produced this narrative. The idea is that movement for Black lives is the new symbol, a new message - a statement wherein people are calling to the attention of those who seem to want to understand that the movement for Black lives will not dissipate. While it shares an intellectual lineage with the Civil Rights Movement, the Black Power Movement, the Négritude Movement, and the Black Consciousness Movement, it aims to make such a general and complex statement so as to confuse some into the misapprehension that it makes no philosophical claim.

"I can't breathe" focuses on the precise moment of a tragic death from the victim's perspective. Not only is the verb "breathe" so basic to our shared language, as it has been since it emerged alongside the noun "breath" in Middle English; it is basic to our physical functioning. So much so that one easily forgets its essentiality. Originally "breath" and "breathe" had to do with smell. This meaning was replaced in English for the air drawn in and expelled from the lungs. As an expression of solidarity, "I can't breathe" is easily modified into the more inclusive "We can't breathe." It is not simply about empathizing with Eric Garner's death but about mobilizing this moment or inspiring praxis. At the New York rally for the movement, signs such as "Justice can't breathe" and "Our democracy can't breathe" extended the moment well beyond the physical. I am reminded of Fanon's confusing admission: "There is a zone of non-being, an extraordinarily sterile and arid region, an incline stripped bare of every essential from which a genuine new departure can emerge. In most cases, the black man cannot take advantage of this descent into veritable hell."³⁹ This lifeless region is the same place Garner could not breathe.

Conclusion

One must consider the complexity and severity of the message of the movement for Black lives. A careful intellectual history of a message as pervasive as "Black lives matter" could not simply focus on the American context. It would have to account for the global project of Black demise both on the

streets and in theory. My argument has been that key ideas of the movement have resonances with Fanonian ideas in *Black Skin, White Masks*: his critique of universal humanisms, his attention to the role of the body, and finally his sociodiagnostic approach for understanding the effects of anti-Black racism. The other reason to think about other thinkers in the Black radical tradition is the globalism of the movement itself. What about Andrew Loku (a South Sudanese refugee living in Toronto who was shot by a police officer)? What about Mark Duggan (who was shot by a police officer in North London)? What about Ms Dhu (an Aboriginal woman who died in police custody in Western Australia)? I have focused on Fanon, yet there are other figures to consider such as Malcolm X, Angela Y. Davis, and C. L. R. James.⁴⁰ We do not need Rawls to do this work.

My claim is not that one should ignore the racial context in the United States or the circumstances that led to the emergence of the movement for Black lives. The intention of the movement for Black lives is to connect Black people from all over the world who have a desire to act together in their communities. The impetus for that commitment was, and still is, the rampant and deliberate violence inflicted on Black people. There are principles guiding the movement, although it has been suggested that that movement is a blurry political hope without a leader. Those guiding principles of the movement are: diversity, restorative justice, globalism, queer affirming, unapologetically Black centered, collective value, empathy, loving engagement, transgender affirming, a focus on Black communities, a focus on Black women, a focus on the Black family, and finally an intergenerational focus. To some, this list of principles might sound unfocused and cumbersome. Others might even doubt the status of some of these as principles by turning to political emotions such as anger.⁴¹ It captures a range of Black experiences. It intends to repair community relationships. It has an international perspective. The movement has a collection of ideas rather than a singular one with one message: Black lives matter. The vocation of this new humanism is to give Blackness a "lightness of being," that to which "taking me out of the world put me back in the world," "to introduce invention into life," or better yet to make Black lives matter.⁴²

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Footnote

1. "About: Black Lives Matter"
2. Ibid.
3. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xv.
4. Ibid., xi.
5. King, *The Trumpet of Conscience*, 41. King mentions Fanon: "These young theorists of violence elaborately scorn the process of dialogue in favor of the 'tactics of confrontation'; they glorify the guerilla movement and especially its new martyr, Che Guevara, and they equate revolutionary consciousness with the readiness to shed blood. But across the spectrum of attitudes toward violence that can be found among radicals is there a unifying thread? I think there is. Whether they read Gandhi or Frantz Fanon, all the radicals understand the need for action -direct self-transforming and structure-transforming action" (41).
6. Wilderson, "Afro-Pessimism and the End of Redemption." Wilderson claims, "AfroPessimism argues that Blacks do not function as political subjects; instead, our flesh and energies are instrumentalized for postcolonial, immigrant, feminist, LGBT, and workers' agendas. These so-called allies are never authorized by Black agendas predicated on Black ethical dilemmas. A

Black radical agenda is terrifying to most people on the Left because it emanates from a condition of suffering for which there is no imaginable strategy for redress-no narrative of redemption." Wilderson coined the term "Afro-Pessimism" to refer to the framework.

7. Taylor, *From #BlackLivesMatter to Black Liberation*; Lebron, *The Making of Black Lives Matter*
8. For instance, Immanuel Kant, John Locke, and George Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel are all key examples.
9. There is an entire philosophical enterprise devoted to showing how John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice* could apply to racial justice, yet in all of the 560 pages Rawls never mentions Black demise or anti-Black racism. Mills, "Rawls on Race/ Race in Rawls," 161-84; Mills, "Retrieving Rawls for Racial Justice," 1-27; Shelby, "Race and Ethnicity, Race and Social Justice," 1697-714; Shelby, "Racial Realities and Corrective Justice," 145-62.
10. Bernasconi, "Love of Humanity, Love of the Other," 189-98. Bernasconi outlines the difficulties of discussing the term.
11. Giustiniani, "Homo, Humanus, and the Meanings of 'Humanism'" 168-71. Giustiniani traces the etymology of the term "humanism" and points out that the common meaning "as 'whatever is characteristic of human beings, proper to man'" does not capture the other important connotations that go along with the term such as learned (168).
12. Schiller, "The Definition of 'Pragmatism' and 'Humanism,'" 235-40.
13. Heidegger, "Letter on Humanism," 239-76. Heidegger argues that humanism is the discovery of man's virtue as a new vision of history and establishment of new ways of thinking. Heidegger writes, "In defining the humanity of man humanism not only does not ask about the relation of Being to the essence of man; because of its metaphysical origin humanism even impedes the question [of Being] by neither recognizing nor understanding it" (245).
14. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii.
15. Marx, "The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte," 594-617.
16. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 198.
17. Sartre, "Black Orpheus," 113-42.
18. Freud, *Interpretation of Dreams*; Freud, *Studies in Hysteria*.
19. Davis, "Keynote Address."
20. Davis, introduction to Khan-Cullors and bandele, *When They Call You a Terrorist*.
21. de Castillo, "Unconscious Racial Prejudice as Psychological Resistance," 262-79. Castillo discusses the issues with the implicit bias model.
22. Sartre, *Critique of Dialectical Reason*. Sartre writes, "In so far as the inert sentence passed on the colonized peoples becomes the serial unity of the colonialists (in its ideological form), or their link of alterity, it is the Idea as Other or the Other as Idea; it therefore remains an Idea of stone, but its strength derives from ubiquity of absence. In this form of alterity, it becomes racism" (300). This racism depends on white collectivity. An attitude of complicity is only one of the ways whites maintain the racist structure. The larger support comes from white people's passive self-conception. Sartre explains that complicity and passive self-conception are primarily enacted through exclusion, epistemic silencing, and dehumanization of the Other. This enactment occurs as the invisible discourse of whiteness. Therefore, the propositions of racism are not produced by experience; thus they are unknowable and inscrutable. Given that people present themselves as individuals and insist on their passive self-conception, any generalization displaces that individuality and substitutes itself for experience of the individual, obviating its possibility. Therefore, for Sartre, racist activity is always pursuant to generalizing propositions rather than to experience. This (so-called) passivity is truly an activity-racist idea-axis (readymade ideas).

23. Jeffers, "Should Black Kids Stop Wearing Hoodies?," 129-40.
 24. Warren, *Ontological Terror*, 1. In his introduction, Warren makes mention of my topic here: "A deep abyss, or a terrifying question, engenders the declaration 'Black Lives Matter'" (1).
 25. There are scholars that rightfully emphasize the Black body and turn to Fanon to do so. Marriot, "The Racialized Body," 163-76; Marriot, "On Racial Fetishism," 215-48; Yancy, *Black Bodies, White Gazes*.
 26. Patterson, *Slavery and Social Death*, 38. Patterson writes, "Slavery is a highly symbolized domain of human experience. While all aspects of the relationship are symbolized, there is an overwhelming concentration of the profound natal alienation of the slave. The slave's isolation, his strangeness that made him most valuable to the master, but it was his very strangeness that most threatened the community. On the cognitive and mythic level, one dominant theme emerges, which lends an unusually loaded meaning to the act of natal alienation: this is the social death of the slave" (38).
 27. Alcoff, *Visible Identities*; Alcoff, "The Problem with Speaking for Others," 5-32.
 28. Fanon, *The Wretched of the Earth*, 44.
 29. Garner, interview with Benjamin Dixon.
 30. Cave, "Officer Darrien Wilson's Grand Jury Testimony."
 31. Xiong, Stahl, and Chanen, "Yanex Takes the Stand."
 32. Philosophers of race have written much about this case. See Yancy and Jones, eds., *Pursuing Trayvon Martin*.
 33. *Ibid.*, 2.
 34. "About: Mothers Against Police Brutality."
 35. Wynter, "Towards the Sociogenic Principle," 30-66. Wynter claims the sociogenic principle: "What Fanon proposes here therefore is the possibility of a phenomenology in whose context, specific neuroses can be seen to have been lawfully induced; with an analysis of the processes of their constitution, thereby coming to make possible a phenomenology of the self, which is not only the phenomenology of a 'type,' but also one in which the projected 'transcendental' subjectivity of Husserlian phenomenology, can be transformed into that of a mode of subjectivity, not only to a historical time and place, but also to a specific cultural constellation: to its system of meaning" (31).
- Marriott, *Inventions of Existence*, 45-89. Marriott claims, In his need to challenge the canonical narratives of European Man (the problem of secular or anthropological humanism and the institution of colonialism) or in his need to sustain life beyond the colony's ethnobourgeois economy (the problem of poverty and debt and the legal-political definitions of sovereignty and self-proprietty), Fanon thus ends where he begins: with a call for the reinvention of European humanism" (46).
36. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xv; emphasis mine.
 37. It was only recently that Jason Van Dyke was charged with second degree murder for the death of Laquan McDonald.
 38. Fulton and Martin, *Rest in Power*, xi. Fulton describes the moment she received the call about her son's death as an "abstraction" (xi).
 39. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, xii; emphasis mine.
 40. Malcolm X, "The Ballot or the Bullet," 23-44. Davis, *Freedom is a Constant Struggle*. James, "Letters to Constance Webb," 127-52. James has written the most illuminating statement about social praxis: "Why the popularity of the Western? Because young people who sit cramped in buses and tied to assembly lines terribly wish they could be elsewhere. . . . Like all art, but more than

most, the movies are not mere reflection, but an extension of the actual—an extension along the lines which people feel are lacking and possible in the actual. That, my dear, is the complete secret of Hegelian dialectic. The two, the actual and the potential are always inseparably linked; one is always giving to the other. At a certain stage a crisis takes place and a complete change is the result" (129).

41. Again, the study of primarily individual political emotions is had on an inappropriate level as it minimizes the gravity of the problem Black people face, which is the problem of vitality. I would resist doing this type of analysis where Black lives are concerned. Erica Garner was angry. Her anger does not need a typologized name.
42. Fanon, *Black Skin, White Masks*, 89, 204.

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