

Carpenter Center

IN
CONVERSATION

JA'TOVIA

GARY AND

FRANK B.
WILDERSON III

for the Visual Arts

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Ja'Tovia Gary and Frank B. Wilderson III
Moderated by Aria Dean
October 8, 2020

Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts,
Harvard University



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Ja'Tovia Gary, *The Giverny Document (Single Channel) (stills)*, 2019.
16 mm video (color; sound; 41 minutes). Courtesy of the artist and
Paula Cooper Gallery, New York.

This conversation took place over Zoom at 7:00 p.m. EST on Thursday, October 8, 2020. This publication is the third in a series of edited transcripts that record the Carpenter Center's public programs during the COVID-19 pandemic.

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DAN BYERS : Hi, everyone. I'm Dan Byers, the John R. and Barbara Robinson Family Director of the Carpenter Center for the Visual Arts. We are honored and grateful to host artist and filmmaker Ja'Tovia Gary and writer Frank B. Wilderson III, professor of African American Studies at University of California, Irvine, in a conversation introduced and moderated by artist, writer, and curator Aria Dean. Before I hand it over to Aria, I want to acknowledge and thank my colleagues Laura Preston and Liv Porte for their work on this series, and especially Liv for their expert coordination of tonight's event. I want to thank all of our graduate-student collaborators in the Department of Art, Film, and Visual Studies for conceiving of this event as part of the (*Im*)possibility conference, and for sharing this symposium keynote with the Carpenter Center.

With that, we're so lucky to have Aria Dean with us tonight. Aria is an artist, writer, and curator whose work has been shown at the Hammer Museum, the Albright-Knox Gallery, the ICA Philadelphia, the ICA at Virginia Commonwealth University, and many other institutions

internationally. Her writing has appeared in *Artforum*, *e-flux*, and *The New Inquiry*, among others. She's a curator at Rhizome.

ARIA DEAN : Thank you for the introduction, and thank you for having me. It's an honor to introduce and moderate this conversation. Thank you to everyone who was part of organizing this conference, and thank you to everyone who is attending.

Unless you're just tuning in, you've just seen Ja'Tovia Gary's film *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)* (2019). *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)* employs found footage, traditional woman-on-the-street documentary strategies, and experimental narrative and cinematic strategies to meditate on the safety and bodily autonomy of Black women. This film is exciting both in its formal presence and its subject matter. Tonight is particularly exciting because we not only get to see this film, but we are bringing together two thinkers and practitioners to celebrate Black women making film and to bring together the theory and practice of what it means to make a Black film. Frank Wilderson has written extensively on this topic in his book *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (2010), and Ja'Tovia has worked through these ideas for a long time as well. *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)* in particular—both formally and in terms of the narrative—is asking how it feels to be a Black woman.

I want to give a gloss on some of the ideas I hope we might get into tonight. As many of you know, Frank Wilderson is one of a number of theorists whose work has been classified as Afropessimist. Afropessimism is a lens of analysis that argues that the structural antagonism that forms the ground for our world—particularly in the U.S.—is one between the category of the human and the category of the slave or the Black. Afropessimism also argues that Blackness is a structural position, not simply an identity, and one that must be theorized, fleshed out, and considered in order to understand how the world is structured. The Afropessimism framework is a very important development in Black studies, and also in the range of fields that Black studies touches, although maybe it's less of a development and more of an addition to the map or the territory. Wilderson's writing on Afropessimism has been influential to me and many others, and he continues to contribute to the field. I'd encourage everyone to read his most recent book, *Afropessimism* (2020).

Wilderson's work on cinema, *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*, is also one of my favorite texts. The text is particularly useful with regard to the *(Im)possibility* conference, because rather than looking at the *how*, or the *should*, of representation, it asks about the impossibility and possibility of representation itself, and asks if cinema can do right by Blackness. This leads to other questions like, "What is a Black film?"

Wilderson uses cinema as a case study for understanding how Blackness functions in America. He arrives at further questions, such as how the position of the Black or the slave relates to both temporality and narrative, and at the impossibility of a classic narrative arc with all the catharsis and denouement of traditional cinema.

I think it's interesting to think about these ideas today in terms of how they might lend themselves to experimental cinema. And *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)* really does bounce between narrative and experimental strategies, and formally references a lot of earlier experimental video art materialities. I hope we might talk about these questions—in particular, "What is Black film?" and "How do we do Black film?"

I'm also interested in digging into the Afropessimist offering around the ways cinema can explain something essential about Black suffering, either through its failure towards narrative or through the complications that arise as we attempt to mark out the manifestations of Black being. *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)* is a great example of a Black woman filmmaker working through the conditions of Blackness, both on screen formally and in an embodied reality through those interviews with women on the street. There's lots to talk about in terms of montage, experimental cinema, and the very gesture of asking Black women whether they feel safe. Because the question "Do you feel safe in your body?" is a broad question, the film becomes a beautiful panorama of the

variety of experiences that these women have. But the film also seems to me like an experiment in the capacity of the very notion of “experience” to do justice to describing the condition of Blackness as it is embodied through Black people.

This leads me to think about the intersections or slippages between Afropessimism and feminism. There are a lot of well-known, fantastic Black women writers who are considered to be part of this network of Afropessimist thinkers. Maybe we can think about feminism in relation to the experiences of Black women and the theoretical position of Black women in this larger complex of ideas. With that, the biggest question to me is what happens when safety is ensured to Black women and gives way to agency and autonomy? Denise Ferreira da Silva has written that the liberation of Black women could bring about liberation for the rest of the world.

These questions are quite timely with the events of this summer. But these are also evergreen questions, and they are the questions not only of our time but of our country and for our world, as Afropessimism would venture to say.

Okay, I’m going to get out of the way so that we can get to the conversation. Thank you for having me.

JA’TOVIA GARY : Thank you, Aria.

FRANK B. WILDERSON III : Yes, thank you. Hi, Ja’Tovia. How are you doing?

JG : You know, I’m yet holdin’ on. How are you?

FBW : I’m hanging in there. I just want to say, I love your film. To say that I enjoyed it . . . It moved me, but I don’t know if “enjoyment” is the word that I’m looking for. If I can enjoy being haunted, maybe that’s the word for it.

JG : I appreciate you. I also want to thank Aria for that amazing introduction. And I want to thank Liv Porte, Dan Byers, Laura Preston, Keisha Knight, and everybody who was instrumental in this event. And you, Frank. It’s really great to be here with you. I think you’re really fascinating. I’m very excited by this.

FBW : I am too, to be here with you. And thanks to the Carpenter Center. It would be great if we could break the ice by being in person, but we’ll do the best we can remotely. Could I start by talking about your film?

JG : Please.

FBW : I’m going to admit it’s a little self-serving on my part, but when I saw the film I thought, “Oh, my goodness, I wish I had seen this before I planned my two classes.” One of my classes is “Race and the Art of Writing,” in which we’re trying to problematize the narrative arc, and the other class is “The Black Protest Tradition.” Later in the quarter, we’ll be reading Saidiya Hartman’s *Scenes of Subjection*:

Terror, Slavery, and Self-Making in Nineteenth-Century America (1997) coupled with Evelyn Hammonds's "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality" (1997). These are readings that I've taught for some time now. Your film really resonated with my reading of "Toward a Genealogy of Black Female Sexuality."

For the uninitiated audience who hasn't read that article by Hammonds, there are many points that are very important to my teaching and my writing, and also to my class. I'm going to shout out my students now, because I told them to come to this event so that they might get a handle on what kind of art disturbs the arc of redemption and then hear a discussion about that art in relation to Hammonds's article.

I don't want to do a précis of the article, but at one point when Hammonds talks about the lynching of Black women of different classes and sexual orientations, she makes the point that as much as we all love Ida B. Wells, the Club Women—who in my mind represent middle-class respectability—see themselves as wanting a strategy for dodging the gratuitous violence of lynching and misogynoir aggression. One of the strategies that they're promoting is respectability politics and the desire to be recognized and incorporated into this Victorian notion of the cult of true womanhood. So Hammonds lays that out, and then she says that part of the fallout from this is the Club Women's demonization of the Blues Women for their sexual orientation

and the way they made their music. So the Club Women are coupling respectability with the capacity to dodge gratuitous violence.

The way I read Hammonds's article is that this coupling doesn't work. There may be an "opportunity" for white women to subordinate themselves to the cult of true womanhood to avoid the violence of patriarchy, but there's not a way for Black women to be recognized and incorporated to avoid gratuitous violence. At the end of the article, Hammonds moves from the beginning to the end of the twentieth century and says there has to be a discourse through which Black women mirror themselves to each other. That discourse has to be a text that allows Black women, as Hammonds would say, to not dissemble in terms of sexuality, and to not create hierarchies internal to a Black community between heterosexual women and lesbian women, and that these politics of silence and this culture of dissemblance could be overcome by such a text. Hammonds doesn't go so far as to say that this will be a hedge against gratuitous violence. What she's talking about is a kind of textual performance and intramural conversation that will produce recognition internal to Black femininity as a way forward.

I really see your film as being part and parcel of that project without losing sight of the violence that makes that project necessary. I'd like to hear your comments on that.

JG : I think that's a really good read. I actually haven't read this article, shame on me, but I appreciate you for breaking that down.

I'm very much concerned with the intramural and its many interiors. We can understand "the intramural" as the Black community as a whole, the Black family, Black women, Black queer women, etc. I'm very much interested in what's happening between us, and the more specific, the better. The more specific, the more clarified we can be. And so with *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)*, I wanted to have a conversation with Black women about Black womanhood. There are also Black girls in the film, because I wanted to include across the spectrum of age. It's intergenerational, it is trans-diasporic, it's far reaching.

One of the shortcomings of the film is that it doesn't include a Black trans woman. That's one of the critiques that I've levied against myself. But in my defense of my own critique, the interviews were happening on the spot. And so whoever I came in contact with was who I came in contact with. I often think about how more expansive the conversation would be if we had a true-to-life telling of what it means to be a Black trans woman in this reality.

In addition to the interviews, there's something else happening in the montage part of the film that is very important. It's something I think a lot of people overlook. It's the class critique that is happening in this montage. In many ways, it is kind of a self-drag. I grew up as a working-class person, but despite coming from a working-class

family, my parents situated us in a suburb. This is something that you and I have in common, Frank. (Although we didn't live in a mansion, we lived in a three-bedroom!) As somebody who grew up working class, the daughter of preachers and factory workers and car mechanics, I have now been able to experience a different type of class reality. So I am almost always experiencing a kind of dissonance, and that dissonance was very acute in the garden in Giverny, where I was drinking Calvados and eating the finest and most decadent of French cuisines, and surrounded by white people who were pointing at old paintings from Impressionist masters.

I was having some problems in that space, especially when I was considering the violence of what was happening at home. And so the montage part—where we're going from the garden to Diamond Reynolds's Facebook live as she's filming the murder of her boyfriend, Philando Castile—was the original film. That first film is *Giverny I (Négresse Impériale)*, and it's a seven-minute capsule, this nugget that everything else is blooming out from. *Giverny I (Négresse Impériale)* was my attempt to grapple with this extreme dissonance, this acute quadruple consciousness that I was experiencing as a Black American person in Northern France, while we are being hunted across the water.

So I'm thinking about our relationships to one another across class lines, and what we owe one another. How are we accountable to people who are not in the garden? And

how are you further destabilized even though you are in the garden, right? I'm still an object in the garden.

If you look at the Negress character, she's cracking. She's losing it. She's holding in a scream. She's running from one side of the frame to the next. She's smoking and disrobing and transgressing against the space. And then finally there's this primal, guttural scream. She's not at ease in this space, even though she's attempting to perform that. She's not at ease.

That's something that has been a lot more present in recent reads of this film—the fact that it is a class critique for the Instagram generation, for folks who can walk into a space and situate themselves in that space and take a really good selfie. What does it mean to be removed from that space? To have that bottom ripped out from under you? Because it's all an illusion. It's all just a shadow and an act.

I'm glad you're talking about class, because that's something that I'm attempting to wrestle with in the film.

FBW : When you said “specific” earlier, what did you mean by that?

JG : I meant that when we talk about Blackness, what's in people's minds is that we are talking about Black men. When we talk about Black womanhood, in people's minds we're talking about a certain type of Black woman. Not a queer Black woman, not a trans Black

woman. We're talking about a dignified, respectable, palatable, and safe Black woman. I'm interested in what Hartman is talking about when she mentions “wayward”—those who are at the margins of society and those kinds of open rebellions. I, of course, wanted *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)* to be central to Black women, but I wanted to make sure that it was “inclusive” enough but also specific enough that we're touching on as many different variations of Black womanhood and Black girlhood as possible.

FBW : I'm hearing what you're saying about class and I'm not disagreeing with it, but I'm also thinking about the fact that Condoleezza Rice walked into a boutique in Paris and couldn't get service.

JG : You mean Oprah? Condi or Oprah?

FBW : Oh, I thought it was both of them, actually. I just chose Condoleezza because she's so far on the other side in terms of politics.

JG : Is she? [*Laughing*].

FBW : [*Laughing*] You know, that reminds me of something—and this was said publicly. When I was on a panel with Charles Burnett at the Berkeley Art Museum & Pacific Film Archive, he said something that made me

choke on my water. He said working for Oprah was worse than working for the Klan.

JG : [*Laughing*] Stop you there. Listen, I'm already black-listed, okay? I don't need to go further.

FBW : I won't say anything from the private conversation Burnett and I had beforehand.

JG : You can speak freely. It's a double-edged sword for me, because I am known as having a pretty sharp critique of the powerbrokers in Hollywood, both Black and white.

I'm wondering about your thoughts on Black cinema, on Black film, on Black people in film. I'm wondering, what do you think are the possibilities and the limitations for Black people in film? Because I have a lot of friends who are really talented people, Frank, but who could be imagining otherwise. These are friends who are interested in making their way into Hollywood so that they can have the resources that that space affords them, even though they understand that that space is going to be violent to them, is going to make them work three times as hard, and that their visions might be distorted in that space. So I try to have conversations with these friends about alternatives. But oftentimes, people are set on entering that space and attempting to make their way there. So I'm wondering, what do you think are the possibilities for Black filmmakers who want to make work within the

institution of Hollywood? And what do you think of the work coming out of Black Hollywood?

Maybe I'm being too provocative.

FBW : Now you're going to get me on the list.

JG : [*Laughing*] You're already on the list.

FBW: What I want my students to see is that there's a price to be paid for making a film like the one that you made and that we just saw.

I joke when I talk about this, because normally I talk about it with respect to my own life. Richard Pryor used to say, "I got mustard gas wounds all over my body!" I'm sixty-four years old. People think I'm successful, but I've had mostly thirty years of rejection and jaundiced eyes. Where I'm at isn't where I've been. And it's precisely because of my refusing the seduction of the denouement. I'm sorry that the apparatus of enunciation gets more and more draconian and more and more oppressive the higher you go up the food chain. Film production is about as high up the food chain as you can get.

There's a lot of room in cinema for a hundred thousand different kinds of stories at the level of content. There's no room in cinema for different stories at the level of structure. If anyone doubts me: In 1997, when I came back from South Africa, I wanted to be a film producer, so I took a course at UCLA evening school. It was

basically training to be a script writer. One of the things I learned is that you're given three hundred scripts. I came in naively thinking it was about the story. But no, it's about the arc of the narrative, and it's about the narrative being beholden to moral judgment, psychological motivations, the journey of an individual—and a sense that no matter what this story is about, at the end of the arc, the individual relationship can be redeemed and the social, political, engendered contradictions that the story unleashed can be smoothed over. And if you don't know how to read three hundred scripts to find that arc, whether it's about the Middle Ages or sci-fi, you're not going to get a job as a script reader or a producer. They want ten possibilities out of three hundred scripts, so the game is already rigged against an aesthetic expression of the Black experience. Because you have to lie on both ends of the spectrum: You have to lie to say that our lives have some form of equilibrium, which then at the conflict stage of the narrative will be lost, and you have to lie about the possibility of that equilibrium coherently returning. This is the narrative framework that is true for everybody else except Black people.

What I really appreciated about *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)* was this haunting question of "Do you feel safe in your body?" The specificity of it being asked and answered by Black women is absolutely necessary, because for hundreds of years we've asked only about Black men.

One of the things that we have to also understand is that it's the question of all Black people; it's just that we haven't been able to hear the stories of Black women. It's not a question for any other group of people. For others, the question might be, "Do you feel safe in this kind of colonialism?" "Do you feel safe in this kind of capitalist exploitation?" Or "Do you feel safe in some type of coherent form of oppression?" But our question is precisely what you asked: "Do you feel safe in your flesh?"

I jokingly say to my students that if you want to write that book (and I have), and if you want to make that film (and you have), then be prepared to have the distribution network be your crib, your family, and some homemade popcorn on the couch, 'cause Edwards Cinema ain't buying it.

There are various levels of aesthetic practices in film, and the most draconian is cinema. This sounds a bit hyperbolic, but the way to be successful is you just have to not be Black.

JG : I hear you 100%. It's funny that you mentioned distribution, because this is something that remains an obstacle for even the most talented and hardworking of my colleagues and peers. You toil and toil for five years, six years, working on a film. The next thing you know, your distribution channels are . . . [draws hand across neck] I'm going to be selling DVDs out of my trunk, like Master P No Limit, you know? By any means necessary.

You see that the channels for disseminating the work are not as robust as those of your white peers. If I were giving advice to the younger people who are interested in cinema or filmmaking of any kind, here is what I would say. I would say: I understand that everybody wants to be a director and a visionary. Everybody wants to write a script. But there are not a lot of people who want to reimagine and formulate what a distribution channel for Black cinema would look like. No one even wants to think about what it looked like historically in the race films days, when segregation had us having to do for self. In many ways, we were more autonomous in that context.

So that's something that I would pose as a challenge to a lot of the young folks coming up. I would challenge them to flex their imaginations towards what it would look like to get real Black cinema, liberatory cinema, out to the masses of Black people who need to see it, and who want to see it.

FBW : You're so right. I completely forgot that my grandfather ran a tiny race cinema for Blacks, like Oscar Micheaux and that kind of thing. It's amazing—I never met him and I was never in there, but I used to know about that. I had completely forgotten about this. Can I ask you another question?

JG : Certainly.

FBW : I guess there are two questions in one. In some of the interviews with you that I've read, you talk about the importance of editing for you. In one interview, you ask yourself if you are a director who edits or an editor who directs.¹ I think you kind of lean towards the second one. In the interview, you talked about the control that you want, which editing gives you.

I made a short, twenty-two-minute film called *Reparations. . . Now* (2005), and editing terrified me. So I just mocked up the film on a sheet of paper and handed it over to someone else. After reading that interview with you, I thought, "What if I had done the editing myself? What are the possibilities? What might have I accomplished if I had actually done the tactile work of editing myself?"

What does that mean for you?

JG : That's a really good question, because I'm finding that as I continue in my practice I'm having to shift. I've been making films since 2011. (Well, that's not true. I made a VHS tape for a boyfriend in high school. Just a cute little "Hi!") Anyway, from 2011 until now I was editing my own stuff. For me, it was about control and it was about a specific voice, a specific grammar and language I was attempting to formulate. I needed to use this grammar and didn't feel like anyone else could do it. It was very much about control, but it was also about asserting my own subjectivity.

I have training in documentary filmmaking, and I had a really difficult time in grad school because there was one way of teaching nonfiction filmmaking. It was that of American *cinéma vérité*—observational, fly-on-the-wall, we're hands off, we've disappeared and are peering at these people, and we're attempting to occupy a neutral space. I had real problems with that, both philosophically and conceptually. I understood that it was a kind of colonial practice, and I wanted to move in a different way. I wanted to assert the fact that I was here. I wanted to assert that my point of view was subjective, and that there is a power dynamic that exists in the room as we're making things. I'm not neutral. I'm bringing all of my lived experiences, and they are meeting yours. I'm bringing all of what I know and what I don't know, and it's meeting the film's subject and collaborators. Hell, the moment you place the camera somewhere, you've made a decision that has a point of view. The moment you've chosen what you want to shoot, you've made a decision. That's not neutral.

To me, editing went hand in hand with this philosophy of showing my hand, of inscribing my experience right alongside that of the subject matter or the collaborator. So editing was very much about control. The practice of weaving in archival footage and direct animation was, to me, a kind of craftwork, a kind of folk work that stretches all the way back to Black women who are quilting, making bottle trees or dirt sculptures, or painting. These folks who are "untrained" artists but who are creating

from a very intuitive space, a very ancestral space, and it's functional. It's not simply pretty. So I'm looking at the work as a kind of quilt. And the labor behind cutting and etching on 16 mm was important to me because I got to think about what I was actually saying. It wasn't just rote, where I was assembling something.

I mentioned, however, that I'm shifting now. I'm making a film about my family—*with* my family, I should say—and I've been working on this film for at least six years, probably longer. I'm interviewing my mama, my daddy, my brother and sister, my former boyfriends, former lovers, my eighty-five-year-old grandparents, great aunts, everybody who wants to talk and meet me there. I'm basically trying to get to the root of this question around who you are in relation to your most foundational kin. I'm asking questions around kinship, but also questions around intergenerational trauma and if there can be intergenerational healing. What are we passing down? What are we repeating? And can we disrupt that?

I'm finding it very, very difficult to edit this film, Frank. There's a great deal of resistance, and I might just be "subjectively implicated." My subjectivity, which I stand so firm in, is something I'm having to recalibrate now. I'm having to relinquish control and let someone else walk this path with me so that I am not doing a disservice to the footage and to my family and to myself. I'm too close. So I'm in the process of reexamining that entire statement about subjectivity, and that entire philosophy behind editing. That

doesn't mean that I won't ever cut anything again—I enjoy editing. You can't be hard and fast. You can't be dogmatic when making art. You have to be flexible.

FBW : Yes. And this question of intergenerational trauma, especially within Black generations, is really vexing when it comes to art. I've written two books that could be called memoirs. The first, *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid* (2008), is definitely memoir. *Afropessimism* could be called auto-theory, but it's part memoir and part critical theory. When I teach creative writing, students want me to answer the question about how to write about one's family, especially when it's a Black family.

I won't answer that question because I can't answer it for myself, so I give my students three sayings that offer three different ways in. I give these three visions to avoid having to answer the question myself, because it's still a question for me, and because I don't want to share everything with the students. I put enough out on the page that terrifies me. I don't want to have to put it up again in the classroom. I also don't want to be the oracle who tells you what to do as an artist.

I'm going to say these three sayings now, and maybe you can respond in some way. First, there's a white writer named Anne Lamott who basically says just write your truth, don't worry about anybody else. If people don't like what you wrote in your memoir, they should have been kinder to you.

Then there's Toni Cade Bambara, who came to the Loft Literary Center in Minneapolis when I was a teacher there. She did a masters workshop for the creative writing teachers. I asked her that question, and she was emphatic that she would never write about anyone close to her—not the women on her block, not her mother and father, and not her family members. It's an ethical line that she would not cross.

The third one comes from 1972, from a discussion between James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni. You know that one, right? Giovanni's asking Baldwin about the gut-wrenching ways in which Baldwin has talked about himself and his father. Baldwin, who is sort of speaking out to his dad who is dead, says, "When the book comes out it may hurt *you*—but in order for me to do it, it had to hurt me first. I can only tell *you* about yourself as much as I can face about myself. And this has happened to everybody who's tried to live."²

So I hear some echoes of Baldwin in what you're describing. And when I read the title of your upcoming film, *The Evidence of Things Not Seen*, I immediately thought of the James Baldwin book of the same title, and of the Atlanta child murders from 1979 to 1981, which is intergenerational trauma.

JG : Thank God for Baldwin. And yes, you're hearing echoes of him because I'm of his mindset. I don't have the mindset of Lamott, who's like, "If you want to be portrayed

better, then you should have behaved better.” And I don’t have the mindset of Bambara, though she was amazing, bless her soul.

I think it is within the artist’s domain to be able to talk about their lives and to be able to express the realities of their relationships, specifically about the people closest to them. Hell, I’ve been portrayed. I have an ex-boyfriend who is a really well-known filmmaker, and sometimes I wonder if he’s going to let it rip. When is he going to drag me? *[Laughing]* Luckily, I’ve interviewed him for *my* film, so I’ll get the first say.

I think Baldwin is definitely onto something. The reason why I’ve had so much trouble with this new film, *Frank*, is because I’m attempting to be very careful about how I portray my family. I love them. Have they traumatized me? Yes. Am I sometimes rageful towards them? Absolutely. Do I consider cutting some of them out of my life completely? Often. But do I want to make sure I portray them in a way that I feel is ethical and careful and loving? Absolutely, 100%. And it’s hurting me. You know, the reason why this shit is taking so long is because sometimes I can barely look at the footage. Often, I’m sitting there in tears. But what is being revealed to me as I watch it and take notes is so profound. It’s like sitting in front of a looking glass, or sitting in front of an altar. What is being revealed, what is being peeled back layer by layer, is engendering in me an extreme level of understanding and compassion that I lacked before.

So it is a daunting task, but it is a necessary task. I ask everybody to continue to pray for me as I make my way through this task, because it’s hard. Ultimately, it is a film about me, but it is about the viewer as well. I’m encouraging the viewer to ask themselves these very difficult questions around their closest relationships. Who are they? What did they bring to that relationship? Were they honest? And were they courageous in that relational dynamic? These questions have the potential to be extremely transformative, and that is why I continue despite it feeling like a self-flagellating exercise.

FBW : I hate to say it, but self-flagellation is going to be productive. It might not be redemptive. And what I mean by that is—and I say this from personal experience—you don’t go home and get thanked for the good work. *[Laughing]*

JG : That I know.

FBW : In fact, you might go home and find out, metaphorically or literally, that the locks have been changed and you can’t get inside.

JG : You might go home and get cussed out, right?

FBW : Yes. My mother and sister cussed me out in the living room after my first work. But I will say this: If you have done it like Baldwin says to do it, you can’t *know* know

until the Black family that is *not* your blood comes back to you and says something. That was a really excruciating thing for me with my first memoir because it took about a year. My blood was like, “This was the most horrible thing you could have ever done to us.” But then what happened was that I heard—and then my parents heard—that there were people going into therapy. Because Black people growing up in white neighborhoods are told how lucky they are, and those people have the most rage, the most subverted rage. You know how they say there’s all this rage in the hood? No, no, no, no, no.

JG : No, no, no.

FBW : There is rage in the Black household in a white neighborhood that could set off a nuclear war. You want to see rage? Go inside a house of some Negroes who have made it.

JG : Frank, I’m so glad you brought this up, because I wanted to get at this. I had a *New York Times* article written about me recently, and it mentioned that I came from a lush suburb. I won’t say that’s completely untrue. From the age of seven to about the end of high school, I grew up in a suburb surrounded by white folks. There were Mexican people there, too; I’m in Texas. But there was a great deal of Black people there as well. We weren’t pioneering. We were not rich, but we weren’t hungry.

Somebody on Twitter—and you know Twitter, they be throwing jabs. I don’t know if you’re on there. They’ll throw a silencer, like “p Chew.” So somebody was like, “These Negroes who grew up in the suburbs think they so pro-Black and be actin’ like they extra mad.” And it’s like, “No, we *are* extra mad.” There’s something about growing up around the intimate violence that comes when you are a seven-year-old going to school with a bunch of white people. It happens early and often.

I noticed that in *Afropessimism*, you’re being subject to a certain amount of white supremacist violence, psychological violence, early on. And it’s coming not just from your peers but from the teachers, from the school administrators, from the parents of your peers. You’re surrounded. Maybe you can get at that. That’s not really a question, it’s just something we share in common. As you can tell, I feel like I’m angrier than a lot of my peers.

FBW : Yeah, and so am I. Part of the hydraulics of that trauma, which has produced this exponential rage, is the fact that there’s this outside narrative saying, “What do you have to be angry about?”

JG : Yeah.

FBW : “You eat well, you got a roof over your head, you can take vacations. The public school you go to is good,

it's not all run-down. What is going on with you?" It's the microaggressions that build up and build up. So you're building this up, you don't have an outlet for returning the violence, and there's no legible narrative in the world that can actually recognize and incorporate what you're going through. So you go from this white neighborhood to a good school, to a nice MFA, to the Giverny gardens, and in my case to Columbia and Dartmouth, and all you have is this lingering sense of inadequacy, trauma, and a sense of surveillance. And there's no auditor for it. There's not even an auditor for the Left that can understand Black suffering, because Black suffering is always empirical, economic, and sequestered for them.

So what do you do? Normally, what happens is that you turn it on other family members. And then you turn it on yourself. I shouldn't say "normally," but a lot of the time. You're not finding expression for it. And that's what I've tried to do in my work: to at least try to find expression for it. That's the danger of the autobiographical aesthetic gesture for someone in our position. Most of the time, our families have projected a sense of having accomplished something. But what we're saying is, no, let's look at the ruin. It's gilded ruin. The ruin of the stomach, the solar plexus, the ulcers, and the psyche. That's the truth. But it's also not what can be translated. And it certainly doesn't get appreciated by those who are part of that narrative. Sometimes it is, but often it's not.

JG : Yeah, I want to be clear. I don't want you thinking that this is some woe-is-me middle-class Black girl song. Things could have been worse. But I think that people often forget that anti-Black violence exists at every level of abstraction. It's happening in the hood, and it's happening in the institution. So where do we turn? We usually turn on one another. So again, I think about questions around the intramural.

I know that we have to make way for Aria and the Q&A, but I'm really interested in what possibilities you think the intramural possesses for us as Black people living under the paradigm you have articulated. Is there restoration?

FBW : I think your film is an example of the intramural because it is an aesthetic gesture that recognizes what we're going through, which we can't always articulate for all sorts of reasons. Aesthetic gestures like your film give voice—and even before voice, give permission—to the wide range of the Black imagination to not appreciate what we've gotten. Not to be appreciative of the fact that we eat three square meals a day, live in nice houses, and went to nice schools. To recognize what it's done for us, but not to be appreciative of it so that it is a destination of our critique with the same intensity we have with our critique of police shootings in the inner city.

JG : I see.

FBW : I don't think we need to be saved, but it helps us recognize something. I don't know if that's what you're asking.

JG : I think you're getting at it. There are so many more questions I have for you. I wish we had time to talk about George C. Wolfe's play *The Colored Museum*. This is a place where we overlap as well. I used to be an actor and would perform "Git on Board," the Miss Pat monologue. But I want to allow Aria to start the Q&A.

FBW : I've been a dramaturg for that play twice.

JG : It's phenomenal. I love it. George C. Wolfe is a genius.

FBW : Yes he is. Hi, Aria.

AD : Hi. It's been a pleasure to listen.

FBW : I forgot there were three hundred people here.

AD : The unseen audience is something I've not gotten used to, and I don't think I ever will.

I have a number of questions, but I'm going to start off with the ones motivated by my own interest. One question in response to something you touched on is the idea of "waywardness." I was wondering if there are inspiring examples from cinematic history or video art history in which the "wayward" has been depicted successfully,

without it being negativized or put in a "lessons learned" position within the film.

FBW : Okay, I'll be very quick. One of my go-tos is *The Watermelon Woman* (1996) by Cheryl Dunye. I'm not sure Cheryl Dunye would agree with why I appreciate this film, so I'm not saying that this is what she set out to do. I'm an intellectual magpie, so I see something that sparks my imagination like a magpie goes around stealing stuff from other people to build their own nest.

I teach from that film a lot, and what excites me about the film is the way in which it poses certain questions. First of all, it's about women and their relationships, and so men are not part of it. And it poses questions internal to Black love and Black relationality, but I don't think it actually answers those questions. I would be less inspired by it if it answered them.

There is one character, Tamara, who is constantly attacking the protagonist, Cheryl's character, for having a white female partner and not sleeping with Black women. The question this raises is can you get out of social death by marrying Black, changing your name, and wearing a dashiki? Or can you get out of social death by integrating? I love the fact that whatever Cheryl Dunye planned, the way the film labors is that the question is not answered, but it's constantly portrayed.

There is also the question of "historical stillness," the phrase from Hortense Spillers, versus the arc of

redemption. Cheryl is searching for “The Watermelon Woman,” and she’s going through the archives, and making her own story out of the archive, but the film actually doesn’t ground the figure in the solid subjective presence of history. I think *The Watermelon Woman* is an amazing film because it asks those questions without answering them, and by mobilizing relationships between Black women in particular, and Black and white women less importantly.

So that’s one example. I won’t talk about the second one, because it will take me longer. There’s a film called . . . Maya Angelou wrote it.

JG : *Down in the Delta* (1998)?

FBW : No. It’s from 1972. It’s about a Black woman who goes to Stockholm as a singer. And that’s another part of my teaching repertoire.

AD : *Georgia, Georgia* (1972).

FBW : Yes. That’s it. Thank you.

JG : It’s an interesting question. A number of things popped into my head, but a part of me wants to go with Kathleen Collins’s *Losing Ground* (1982). In some ways, this may not seem like the right example because the film is about a respectable Black woman, the character

of Sara. She’s a philosophy professor, she is married to a man who is an artist and who’s kind of over the top and uninhibited. His artistic expression is flowing out of him constantly, and she’s a little bit more sedate and calm. Sara desires to be like the artists in her life. Her mother is an actress, her husband is this artist. She wants to engage with an ecstatic experience. This is actually her dissertation research. She’s searching historically and geographically for this idea of an ecstatic experience. She wants to feel something, anything. And at the end, she does so by transgressing in a number of ways.

One of Sara’s students casts her as Frankie in a film of the play *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*. Her student thinks that she’s very beautiful and talented. Everyone feels this energy from her, but she herself doesn’t feel it inside of her. To me, it’s also implied that there is a kind of attraction between her and her co-star. In *Frankie and Johnny in the Clair de Lune*, Frankie shoots her lover. And at the end of *Losing Ground*, Sara is decked out in colorful attire, overflowing with a kind of violent passion, and it’s implied that she shoots her husband, who has been carrying on an affair.

To me, this film is really fantastic. It’s a really smart script. In many ways, Sara throws off this respectable shroud that she has donned, and that feels very safe to her, and steps into an unwieldy reality. That’s something I’m inspired by. I named one of my films *An Ecstatic Experience* because I was interested in what transcendence meant

as a way of rest, a way of restoring who we are despite the violence. And thinking through transcendence as that gateway was something that was really generative for me in 2015 when I first saw *Losing Ground*. Much love to the late, great Kathleen Collins for that one.

AD : I think that's a great example. I also think *Losing Ground* is strategic in the sense that Sara appears as this respectable figure, but then her respectability is the source of the bubbling narrative. I think it's quite a successful strategy for grappling with that experience, rather than presenting the obvious representation of grappling within Black womanhood.

This leads me to a complex of questions and thoughts, just because I love Kathleen Collins's writing alongside all of her films. And the conversation about suburban Blackness and middle-class Blackness is very resonant to me coming from Pasadena, California. I think that position is—I don't want to say under-represented, but under-worked-through.

I had a question about "the gaze." I think it's cool we haven't mentioned "the gaze" yet. Of course, the term calls up Lacanian film theory, which is heavily dependent on psychoanalysis, and there have since been interventions into that "white history" of how vision and power operate in film.

I was interested, Ja'Tovia, in how you situate yourself both within the frame and as a Black woman director

behind the camera. What are you thinking about? bell hooks writes about the gaze in cinema, taking up the problems white feminists were working through in film theory and making an argument for Black women's gaze as "oppositional." hooks argues that Black women's identification with the female passive object on screen is blocked since it intersects with her Blackness, placing her in a constitutively different power relation from white women. hooks writes that Black women have not reached a mirror stage, have yet to be offered a "true" representation. Structurally, then, the Black woman's gaze would be oppositional and provide a critical reconfiguring of power as it flows through film. Do you think about the gaze? Do you reject that as a frame for thinking about power and representation in film? Does it feel useful to you?

JG : It's useful to me. I'm glad you brought up hooks, because I was trying to wrack my brain for how to respond to this. I think people use "the gaze" very freely nowadays. For me, when I think about "the gaze," I think of that article from hooks you're describing, "The Oppositional Gaze: Black Female Spectators" (1992).

She talks about looking relations, and relations of power, and how the gaze that Black women have had as spectators of cinema has often been a critical gaze, and how that is a way of asserting a certain sort of power in refusing the abject and demoralized depictions that are presented to us through the mainstream media. So that's

something that I definitely have used in conceptualizing most of my work. The fact that I'm not simply a maker, I am a spectator. I'm watching things very critically, almost to a point of distraction. Like, can I enjoy something? Can I turn it off for five minutes and just look at how pretty it is? But I find myself unable to do that. I'm oftentimes wrestling with how we're being presented and how those depictions of us allow for a certain sort of violence to continue to be perpetrated against us in everyday life.

In situating myself in my work, it was important for me to take on multiple subject positions. To do that was an expression of how varied we are as Black women. And when people ask me, "Well, why are you in the film? And why is Nina Simone there?" Nina Simone is doing a lot of heavy lifting in this work. To me, there's a connection between my body and Nina Simone's body. Specifically, what we're doing with source material—the way she's able to take on a song and completely transform it into something different and new and exciting and pulsating, but also how she is able to take on different subject positions as she is performing. So it was important for me to do this not just as the film's director, the film's editor, the film's animator, the woman on the street giving "newscaster," but also as the Negress in the garden. I'm interested in reflecting back to Black women just how multifaceted we are and just how expansive Black womanhood is, and that there's power in being able to occupy these multiple subject positions, because

it destabilizes these very narrow views and constraints we've been trapped in. We're often trapped in Hollywood depictions, these tropes. So how multivalent, how fully fleshed out, how fully formed can I be in this space? I hope that's approaching an answer.

AD : Yeah, absolutely.

FBW : Can I ask something? Ja'Tovia, since you brought up Nina Simone, I really want to ask you . . . And again, this is selfish, because I'm thinking about teaching. And if you want it to be ambiguous, say, "Hey, man, I'm not gonna answer that question," okay?

JG : Okay.

FBW : My question is how do we interpret that phrase at the piano? Nina Simone says, "I don't believe the conditions that produced a song like this," if I'm paraphrasing that correctly.

Are you there, Ja'Tovia? Maybe you're frozen on my screen.

AD : Yeah, she is frozen.

FBW: Ja'Tovia is frozen, oh no! I'll wait for her to come back.

AD : Yeah. And then after this question, maybe we'll do a few from the audience. The three of us could be here for hours.

Actually, I have a question for you, Frank, while we're waiting. This is a very particular, selfish, and not-that-useful question, and maybe I've asked it before. But I was rereading hooks's "The Oppositional Gaze" a year ago, and there's this moment when hooks is talking about the lack of truthful, fully fleshed-out representations of Black women on screen. She talks about how, in this Lacanian mirror stage, there's a moment of recognition.

I wonder what you think of this? I know you talk about Lacan in *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms*. Lacan talks about "méconnaissance," and how there is always a misrecognition initially. Does this shift something in terms of what we're asking of representations? If all reflections in that respect are misrecognitions, is there something that shifts in terms of how we think about the capacity of film to do right by us representationally?

FBW : I don't have a good answer, but it's a very important question. And so all I'll give you is the means of approach, because when I get into Lacan, I have to do more background research. It's not like I wrote that chapter of analysis right off the top of my head.

As a political economy-trained Marxist, and with my psychoanalytic training, which comes from Jared Sexton

in graduate school . . . Oh, Ja'Tovia is coming back! Can I go back to what I was saying? Because that's a very difficult question.

AD : Yeah.

FBW : You and I did that interview in *November* magazine.³ Maybe there's something about Lacan and misrecognition in that. Ja'Tovia, can you hear me?

JG : Yes.

FBW : So as I was saying, I imagine everyone has something that just follows them from *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)*. The two things that follow me are "Do you feel safe in your body?" which we talked about. But the other thing that follows me is Nina Simone at the piano, and what she says about the song "Feelings," and I'm paraphrasing: "I don't believe the conditions that produced a song like this." How did you interpret that as you spliced it into your film? What is she doing? What is she saying?

JG : "I don't believe the conditions that produced a situation to demand a song like that" is what she is saying. You know, it's complicated. I think that Nina is a really complex figure. She's a bit of a North Star for me. Not a bit. She is *the* North Star for me. She's somebody I've

been listening to since I was a young teenager. Her work is really profound. She is, to me, a model of how to be an artist with integrity. Paul Robeson and Nina Simone. Lorraine Hansberry. They don't even make Black people like that anymore.

FBW : You!

JG : Thank you. I think Nina Simone's ability to face herself and face what she herself is feeling and wrestling with—people may or may not know, but she was diagnosed with bipolar disorder. I don't see her as someone who is—to use really derogatory, ablest language—"crazy." She seems like someone who is very much in control, even in this moment where she is almost in a ritualistic performance. It's raw, it's unfiltered. To me, those are the best types of performances, where you're just looking at the person next to you and saying, "Are you seeing this? Are you feeling this?"

For me, it's not simply about the song. It's about the conditions of her life, the conditions of the world. This was during a period of her life where things were not going well at all. A lot of her friends were dead by this time. The fervor of the Civil Rights movement was dying down, and law and order was making its way through the streets. And so I think she's not simply talking about romantic love, although that's probably woven in there. I think she's talking about the very lower depths of what

it means to be human on this earth in that moment. She's wrestling on the stage in front of everybody. It's a tour de force in many ways. And she's dragging the audience with her, like, "You're all about to feel this with me." And it's not just, "Oh, play for us, noble Negress." It's like, "No, I'm going to vomit up the anguish," as Baldwin says. "I'm going to make you feel just how raw I feel right now." So I'm interested to hear that you want to know what I think. But I'm wondering what you think about that sentence, since it stood out to you.

FBW : I didn't think in terms of coherent thoughts. I had a kind of sensibility. I wish I had known that you were going to put it back on me. That's a shrewd pedagogic move! [*Laughing*] I would have thought of something. But the resonance for me was that I saw her in college in the '70s. This was towards the end of that Civil Rights, Black Power movement, and it was very invigorating for us in the Black Student Union.

But I also thought this week and last week, watching your film twice, about the dues one pays for not accommodating the network of distribution, if we can go back to that. Nina Simone's husband was a cop who used to beat her, and one of the things that he was always saying is that if you want to be on stage and you want to be on TV like Sarah Vaughan, Ella Fitzgerald, and even Abbey Lincoln, then you got to tone it down and make it in such a way that pleasure can be generated from a white

audience. And she didn't do that. And the downward spiral of the response against her was what I would call gratuitous violence.

JG : I would agree with that. She refused to fit into the norms that were dictated, or the requirements of a Black singer at that time. In fact, she was quite antagonistic towards the audience, which I really like.

FBW : It's better than Miles Davis turning his back to the audience, because his gesture was radically chic, where we feel the pleasure. But Nina Simone just got up, picked up the flowers, and walked away.

JG : And in the concert spliced throughout *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)*, she's also telling people to sit down and shut up. She's pointing, "You, sit down. Shut up."

AD : So we have time for just one audience question. Here's one about whether cinematic strategies can function as modes of care. Maybe we can talk about that for a bit.

Another question that has also been posed in the Q&A is for Ja'Tovia. It's about the process of making *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)* and how it relates to *The Giverny Suite* (2019). How did you approach that process of converting the works from *The Giverny Suite* into *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)*?

JG : On the question of care, Christina Sharpe's *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016) was really instrumental. I read it when it first came out. It was very instrumental while I was making *An Ecstatic Experience*.

Sharpe talks about wake work as a defense of the dead. It's about making sure that folks have dignity in death. So when I am examining the archive, and when I'm using the archive and engaging the archive, I'm doing so with an ethic of care. That ethic of care is greatly informed by Sharpe and Hartman. If I'm tarrying with archival material over the span of several months, if I'm etching and painting on it, I'm becoming intimately familiar with this material and who is in it. Who is in the frame, what are they doing, how are they reacting and what is my response to them? So it's a careful engagement of the archive, and it's not simply about memorializing the dead but making sure that we care for them. Especially when we're talking about the police imagery, which I've spoken about before. When there is a withholding or refusal of a dead Black body, or a bleeding, traumatized Black body, for an audience to be titillated—that's not my practice.

I think that wake work and this care ethic is something that really underscores my practice. It's something that I hope to continue to work in and work through. The Black feminist theorists have given me such a vocabulary, and such an understanding of how to place my work in a matrix of not just other filmmakers but of people who are using archival research to think of new structures and

new forms. I want to tip my hat to them. I thought I'd be able to speak more about Black feminist theory, but the time has gotten away from us.

Wake work and care is what I feel separates my practice from somebody in the mainstream.

In terms of *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)*, *Giverny I (Négresse Impériale)* is seven minutes long, and it's just the montage and the Diamond Reynolds moment going back and forth, back and forth, from the garden, to the police, from the garden, to the police, until we have that guttural scream. That came first. And then I decided to make a three-channel installation from it, which included bringing in Nina and staging these interviews on the corner of 116th and Malcolm X Boulevard in January of 2019, and then bringing in the direct animation of the water imagery. That came second. Then, for *The Giverny Document (Single Channel)*, I simply took the middle channel and let that exist as its own work, because that was the meat of the three channels. It had the narrative structure. The left and the right channels are supplementary imagery from Haiti, drone strikes from the Obama administration, further garden footage, and further recreations from the French film *Chronicle of a Summer* (1961). The work is like one of those Russian nested dolls. It's a film within a film within a film within an art installation.

AD : That about does it for time. This has been so wonderful. Thank you both for your time and your wonderful

thoughts, and for all the work that you do and will continue to do.

FBW : Thank you for the work that you do, Aria, and thank you, Ja'Tovia.

JG : Thank you, Professor Wilderson and Aria.

DB : I just wanted to say a closing thank you to you all; and to our collaborators, the AFVS graduate students; and to everyone at the Carpenter Center. Thank you and goodnight.

ENDNOTES

- 1 See Rooney Elmi, "What Happened When a Filmmaker Asked Black Women Whether They Feel Safe," *Hyperallergic*, October 8, 2019, <https://hyperallergic.com/519343/jatovia-gary-ciff-interview-giverny-document/>.
- 2 James Baldwin and Nikki Giovanni, *A Dialogue* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1973), 69.
- 3 See "Frank B. Wilderson III in Conversation with Aria Dean," *November*, no. 2, <https://novembermag.com/contents/2>.

ARIA DEAN

Aria Dean is an artist, critic, editor, and curator. Her writing has appeared in many publications, including *Artforum*, *Art in America*, *e-flux*, *The New Inquiry*, *X-TRA Contemporary Art Quarterly*, *Spike Art Quarterly*, *Kaleidoscope*, *Texte zur Kunst*, and *CURA* magazine. Her work has appeared in solo exhibitions at the Albright-Knox Art Gallery in Buffalo, New York, and at Château Shatto, Los Angeles, as well as in group exhibitions at Hammer Museum, MIT List Visual Arts Center, Institute for Contemporary Art at Virginia Commonwealth University, and The MAC Belfast, among others.

JA'TOVIA GARY

Ja'Tovia Gary is an artist and filmmaker. Gary's work seeks to liberate the distorted histories through which Black life is often viewed while fleshing out a nuanced and multivalent Black interiority. Through documentary film and experimental video art, Gary charts the ways that structures of power shape our perceptions around representation, race, gender, sexuality, and violence. Gary earned an MFA in Social Documentary Filmmaking from the School of Visual Arts in New York City.

In 2017, Gary was named one of *Filmmaker* magazine's "25 New Faces of Independent Film." Her award-winning films *An Ecstatic Experience* (2015) and *Giverny I (Négresse Impériale)* (2017) have been screened at festivals, cinemas, and institutions worldwide, including

the Edinburgh International Film Festival, Whitney Museum of American Art, Anthology Film Archives, Atlanta Film Festival, Schomburg Center for Research in Black Culture, MoMA PS1, MoCA Los Angeles, Harvard Film Archive, New Orleans Film Festival, Ann Arbor Film Festival, and elsewhere. She has received generous support from the Sundance Documentary Fund and the Jerome Foundation, among others.

In 2016, Gary participated in the Terra Foundation Summer Residency program in Giverny, France. She was a 2018–19 Radcliffe Fellow at Harvard University. Gary is a 2019 Creative Capital Awardee and a Field of Vision Fellow.

FRANK B. WILDERSON III

Frank B. Wilderson III is professor and chair of African American Studies and a core faculty member in the Culture and Theory PhD program at University of California, Irvine, and an award-winning writer whose books include *Afropessimism* (Liveright/W. W. Norton, 2020), *Incognegro: A Memoir of Exile and Apartheid* (Beacon Press, 2008/Duke University Press, 2015) and *Red, White & Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Duke University Press, 2010). He spent five and a half years in South Africa, where he was one of two Americans to hold elected office in the African National Congress during the apartheid era. He also was a cadre in the underground. His literary awards include the

American Book Award, the Zora Neale Hurston/Richard Wright Legacy Award for Creative Nonfiction, the Maya Angelou Award for Best Fiction Portraying the Black Experience in America, and a National Endowment for the Arts Literature Fellowship. Wilderson was educated at Dartmouth College (AB, Government and Philosophy), Columbia University (MFA, Fiction Writing), and University of California, Berkeley (PhD, Rhetoric).

COLOPHON

In Conversation:
Ja'Tovia Gary and Frank B.
Wilderson III

Published by the Carpenter
Center for the Visual Arts,
Harvard University

Editor: Laura Preston
Copy Editor: John Ewing
Program Coordinator: Liv Porte
Designer: Chad Kloepfer

Staff:
Gabrielle Banks, Gallery and
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Generous support for Carpenter
Center programming is provided
by The Andy Warhol Foundation
for the Visual Arts.



Carpenter Center for the
Visual Arts, Harvard University
24 Quincy Street
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Ja'Tovia Gary, *The Giverny Document*
(*Single Channel*) (still), 2019.
16 mm video (color, sound; 41 minutes).
Courtesy of the artist and Paula
Cooper Gallery, New York.

Cc