

Cedric J. Robinson

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On Racial Capitalism,
Black Internationalism,
and Cultures of Resistance

Edited by H. L. T. Quan

FOREWORD BY RUTH WILSON GILMORE

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Introduction: Looking for Grace in Redemption

H. L. T. Quan

This is exactly how the music of *jazz* began, and out of the same necessity: not only to redeem a history unwritten and despised, but to checkmate the European notion of the world.

For until this hour, when we speak of history, we are speaking only of how Europe saw – and sees – the world.

— *James Baldwin, 1979*¹

... [H]umaness is no longer a noun. Being human is a praxis.

— *Sylvia Wynter, 2015*²

[i]n the construction of knowledge there is no beginning and no end...

— *Cedric J. Robinson*³

In a beautiful meditation on music and race disguised as a book review, the ever-vigilant, if understated James Baldwin noted that jazz “is produced by, and bears witness to, one of the most obscene adventures in the history of mankind,” and yet, the giants of jazz managed to “make of that captivity a song.”⁴ Not unlike what jazz does to History, Cedric J. Robinson redeemed political theory, not as a “Master Science” as Aristotle would have it, but as a clarion call for radical, democratic thought, and praxis. Moreover, Robinson imbued it with a practical ethos, one that centers on normative sensibilities, particularly the righteousness of moral action.⁵ Given the rigidity of disciplinary practices in academia, few American political theorists managed this feat – one that provides aid and comfort to legions of students and activists on multiple continents. Grounded in the historical density of Black lives, Robinson’s teaching and publications have made an imprint on scholarship ranging from Black radical thought and the Black Radical Tradition to racial capitalism, police violence, and Black representations in films and music. Equally important, his vision resonates with freedom struggles from the Anti-Apartheid Movements⁶ to Movements for Black Lives. If one knew “how it feels to be free,” as the redoubtable Ms. Nina Simone quivered, learning political theory from Robinson is like “startin’ anew.”

Perhaps echoing Baldwin’s interrogation of History, in an essay published in 1981, “Coming to Terms,” Robinson observed that “the most important issue is

conceptualization: how are we to conceptualize what we were, what we are, what we are becoming?” As a witness and a scholar of racial capitalism and not unlike the intellectual praxis that Sylvia Wynter foregrounds,⁷ Robinson sought responses to those questions throughout most of his life. Considered one of the deans of Black Studies, his works have been essential texts for deconstructing racial capitalism, learning about the Black Radical Tradition, and inspiring insurgent movements from Ferguson to the West Bank.

In recent years there has been an upsurge of interest in Robinson’s work as evidenced by the republication of *The Terms of Order* (2016, University of North Carolina) and *An Anthropology of Marxism* (2019, University of North Carolina), as well as the special journal issue of *African Identities* (Vol. 11, No. 2, 2013), and the edited collection of essays inspired by his work, *Futures of Black Radicalism* (2017, Verso). In addition, and in the two years following his death, there have also been many articles, panels, and conferences organized in the U.S., U.K., and beyond, devoted to his teaching and scholarship. Indeed, the “Black Radical Tradition” is often conflated with Robinson, however ill-advised that might be. Such embellishment notwithstanding, it is apparent that Robinson’s influence extends beyond academe.⁸

The genesis of this collection – *Cedric J. Robinson: On Racial Capitalism, Black Internationalism, and Cultures of Resistance* – was more than twenty years in the making, and the materials herein are based on many conversations with Elizabeth and Cedric Robinson and in the areas of Robinson’s work that he hoped would be elucidated. In the mid-1990s, the former speechwriter for President Kwame Nkrumah of Ghana, Kofi Buenor Hadjor initially proposed that he edit a collection of Robinson’s essays, and Robinson and Hadjor enlisted me to assist in this endeavor. Hadjor was convinced that “people needed to read Cedric,” and as it was before the era of widely distributed pdfs, many of these essays were not readily available in print. Significantly, Kassahun Checole graciously committed Africa World Press to this endeavor. Unsurprisingly, life happened, and the project was tabled until nearly two decades later when Cedric, Elizabeth, and I revisited the project. Also, unsurprisingly, there are twice as many pieces to be taken into consideration as there were two decades ago. We hope that the essays contained in this volume extend Robinson’s much larger *oeuvre* than *Black Marxism* conveys, however influential it is.⁹

For the first time, this volume engages a wide array of Robinson’s essays, reflective of his diverse interests in the interconnections between culture and politics, radical social theory, and classic and modern political philosophy. These essays spanning over four decades include considerations of Africa, Black internationalism, world politics, race and U.S. foreign policy, representations of Blackness in popular culture, and reflections on popular resistance to racial capitalism, white supremacy, and other tyrannies. Each section includes both previously published and unpublished materials, and essays written for an

academic and/or informed audience, as well as those written for the general public.

Collectively these writings and reflections embody both a meticulous scholarship grounded in transdisciplinary research and an insurgent moral authority of a philosophy of democratic resistance and rebellion. Not unlike Baldwin when he admonished us to look to “the unprotected,” and not “the policemen, the lawyers, the judges, or the protected members of the middleclass” to know “how justice is administered,”¹⁰ Robinson’s work forwards a thesis that centers on the belief that a “people in crisis” or the oppressed are more likely to embody a moral authority than the oppressors. Indeed, once “political order” and authoritarianism disguised as leadership are sufficiently dispatched, and their vacuous machinations and promiscuous desires are demystified, Robinson’s readers and students are urged to err on the side of the *demos*: the populous majority, be they slaves, indigenous people, women, or Black people.¹¹ These people are almost always marked as differently vulnerable and are targeted for harm. Just as Sir M. I. Finley long understood, democracy is essentially an exercise of the mob, and as such, political outcomes are rarely guaranteed; so, Robinson recognized democracy as inherently dangerous.¹² He, however, settled on the wisdom that those who are furthest from democratic polity and whose participation is evacuated or eviscerated are necessarily the likeliest to burst that polity wide open, just as those who are furthest away from justice are most likely to instruct us in the meanings of justice. And it is they who will likely be the most passionate advocates of justice. Robinson explained it this way: “Just as Thucydides believed that historical consciousness of people in crisis provided the possibility of more virtuous action, more informed and rational choices, so do I.”¹³ Beyond the need to dislodge “the terms of order,”¹⁴ Robinson was suggesting a righteousness of the moral authority of a “people in crisis,”¹⁵ and perhaps a symbiotic relationship between epistemic and everyday justice.¹⁶

What does it mean to assert a moral authority of those who have been marked as vulnerable, *as the other*, who frequently reside on the margins of authority? Conceptually, the term “moral authority” itself is not uncomplicated. In contrast to the idea of moral bankruptcy as being utterly without morals, moral authority is not so easily recognizable. It is certainly the case that when we use the term moral authority we frequently rely on a constellation of transitive meanings, signifying both contingencies and contradictions. On the one hand, authority connotes, among other things, as the OED tells us, the “right to act,” and the “power to enforce obedience or compliance,” with political supremacy as *a priori*. On the other hand, morality, especially as it relates to principles or rules of conduct, more often than not is concerned with the private behavior of individuals. Put differently, the very term “moral authority” signals collective allegiance to an external order that instructs individuals how to act or how to live.

Moral authority is also necessarily normative. In so far as the goodness or badness of human endeavors are concerned, however, morality is almost always relational and contextualized, and thus contingent. As John Grote observed in *A Treatise on Moral Ideals* (1876), “[A]ll moral words, by frequent complementary use ... have lost much of their warmth and force.”¹⁷ As such, when Robinson appealed to the “more virtuous action” of the *demos*, he was conjuring the power of the collective that inherently resides in the very ideals of a moral majority. This moral majority, however, is neither silent nor complicit with the state or capital. Its authority lies in the fact that it belongs to a “people in crisis,” who all along have contested the legitimacy and morality of “the terms of order,” including the meanings of justice.¹⁸ For Robinson, and unlike a typical jury in countries where police conduct is governed by (not racist laws but) habituated racial supremacy, the victims of violence would almost always be more credible as witnesses than the perpetrators. This normative reasoning reflects what is needed to undo not only past harm but inherent epistemic injustices, when the victims of everyday injustices, including premature deaths, are also denied their credibility as knowers and interpreters of meanings.¹⁹

When political authority becomes our only regime of truth, moral authority is conflated with the state in all its manifestations, and justice is merely “whatever the powerful say it is.” No other better agents of the state or state actors embody this conflation and manifested order than the police. The legitimacy of the state, the *sine qua non* of state authority, thus becomes its moral authority in the embodiment of the police. A police state is thus frequently the most apparent form of authoritarianism, and for this reason, few police officers who killed have been charged or convicted, regardless of circumstances. By asserting the moral righteousness of the protestors, as Robinson did with BLM or the Black South Africans in the struggles against apartheid, for instance, he was reinstating a familiar *oeuvre*, that is, the assertion that there exists a democratic Black political culture that frequently supplants hegemonic moral consciousness with a democratic social ethic of its own, one that is capable of redeeming what has been lost and/or negated.

This double dialectic Robinson derived from positing oppressed people as the more virtuous, hence, those possessing moral righteousness, confronts the facticity of life amidst settler colonialism, racial capitalism, hetero-patriarchy, and white supremacy, among other things, wherein the very meaning of *the other*, especially of Black life, has long been associated with the absence of morality, including morality in the specific form – a redeemable social ethics. Thus, in his quest to redeem political theory as critical theory, Robinson, affectively located emancipatory potentials at the communal, democratic level. In this way, his emphasis on the Black Radical Tradition’s quest for ontological wholeness is akin to a secular search for grace, if grace is understood as a defense against dehumanization and an affirmation of Black life.

When gathering materials for this collection, we imagined it as a companion volume to Robinson's books as well as one that fills the gaps between *The Terms of Order* (1980), *Black Marxism* (1983), *Black Movements in American* (1997), *An Anthropology of Marxism* (2001), and *Forgeries of Memory & Meaning* (2007).²⁰ Given the economics of publishing today, it was a challenge to whittle down the more than 700 pages of work to the current volume. The larger themes of Robinson's *oeuvre* are not difficult to identify: Africa and Black Internationalism, Bourgeois historiography, world politics and U.S. foreign policy, reality and its misrepresentations, and resistance and popular rebellions. Already present in book forms, some more apparent than others, these themes serve as the deep structure of the collection. The essays as organized are not meant to be understood as discreet pieces unencumbered by issues and concerns raised in other sections. For instance, Robinson's preoccupation with the need to interrogate fascism as a form of western, democratic capitalism shows up first in Part II under "On Bourgeois Historiography," then later in Part III under "On World Politics and US Foreign Policy." This is especially true for Parts III and IV where Robinson's extended analysis of the media and its misrepresentations of reality is showcased. Moreover, Africa and the African Diaspora are embedded in each section, either as a subject of inquiry or as an analytic prefiguration.

Finally, the many outlets where Robinson featured his work convey his diverse interests and transdisciplinary approach to social emancipatory scholarship. These forums included academic, peer-reviewed journals and books, local newspapers, and community cultural celebrations, as well as professional meetings and various gatherings at colleges and universities. From the now out of print, *Indian Journal of Political Science*, the Fernand Braudel Center based *Review*, and *Afro-American Studies*, to the always current *Race & Class* and *Radical History Review*, Robinson's work elided orthodoxies, discursive or otherwise. For nearly four decades, *Race & Class*, the U.K. institution for critical scholarship at the intersections of first race and class, and then later, race, class, and gender, was most responsible for publishing the majority of Robinson's writings. The reprints in this volume represent a small sample of this invaluable collaboration between Robinson and the journal.

ON AFRICA AND BLACK INTERNATIONALISM

Black internationalism, a philosophy that approximates the emancipatory power of jazz as Baldwin aspired it to be, grounds many of Robinson's intellectual endeavors and his personal orientation. Part I best captures the promise and depth of the collection, containing both previously published and unpublished materials, including Robinson's most recent research interest – the Black sleuth and the writing of Pauline Hopkins. This section draws attention to one of

Robinson's most enduring thematics: the centrality of Black Internationalism and Africa within the larger discursive frame of Black radicality. "Notes Toward a 'Native Theory' of History," first published in *Review* in 1989, is essential to understanding the importance of the African Diaspora for emancipatory theory building. Here Robinson maintained that the problem with mainstream "Black scholasticism" was that "It does not challenge theft but attempts to reflect it." The production of radical social theories, Robinson argued, requires "coming to terms with the fundamental nature of historical movement," including its organization and social consciousness. For him, recognizing the importance of the Black Diaspora and Black movements necessarily entails "the recreation of Black life," and a new theory of history informed by Black consciousness. So, "In Search of a Pan-African Commonwealth," first appearing in *Social Identities* in 1996, extended Robinson's delineation of Black movements in the forms of a Pan-African Commonwealth. Echoing his wariness of the political as delineated in *Terms*, Robinson insisted that Pan Africanism should be imagined as a thing that includes all "five different spheres of human experience – the prehistorical, the historical, the demographic, the cultural, and the political."

Part I ends with Robinson's most recent research agenda, "The Black Detective and American Memory." It extends his work on racial regimes in *Forgeries* and preoccupation with the African Diaspora as sediments for future Black rebellions. Robinson made use of Black mystery writings as source materials and centered on Pauline Hopkins' work that interrogated an early racial regime in the U.S. and the ways in which she consciously wrote about Black resistance to and liberation from racial oppression. Robinson argued that while Hopkins' "stunning Black radical intellect had so long been assigned to obscurity," her historical fiction embodied "a radical critique of American culture." Hopkins' critique, Robinson maintained, was one intent on the "pursuit of radical solutions for the Black Nation" in the form of "an African diasporic internationalism."

ON BOURGEOIS HISTORIOGRAPHY

Part II signals three of Robinson's most significant contributions to the scholarship on the Black Radical Tradition and emancipatory social theorizing – an emphasis on culture as an analytic resource, the deconstruction of bourgeoisie historiography, and the demystification of leadership. This section also introduces Robinson's exposition and interrogation of fascism as a historical phenomenon, a largely underexplored theme of Robinson's scholarship. An essay on the contemporary attack against multiculturalism and another on Plato's *The Republic* suggest that students of bourgeoisie historiography might venture further back in time to locate its earlier anti-democratic predispositions.

As part of a series of lectures at SUNY Binghamton in 1975²¹ that included luminaries of Black radical theory and revolutionary activism such as Walter Rodney, C. L. R. James, and Imamu Baraka, “The First Attack Is an Attack on Culture” sought to differentiate between “what is an organization and what is revolution.” Influenced by Amílcar Cabral,²² for Robinson, coming to terms with Black internationalism begins with a systematic exploration of culture as an organizing principle for revolutionary change. Robinson extended Marx’s observation that “the first attack is an attack on culture”²³ to take up Haiti, Algeria, and Viet Nam – three theaters of wars and rebellions, and delineated the differences between imperialist and revolutionary attacks on culture. He argued that “the dominant paradigms of human organization, social organization, social moments presume the extraordinary leader,” from whom “comes organizations, structure, ideology.” The demystification of leadership and the unsettling of the political are the main thrusts of Robinson’s doctoral dissertation work at Stanford University,²⁴ which he later elaborated on in *The Terms of Order*, his first major publication. Robinson also made clear the centrality of the collective: “ideas, structures, the organization of a movement ... come from the collective, [they do not] come out of the individual.”

“Oliver Cromwell Cox and the Historiography of the West” is in some ways an addendum to the work Robinson started in *Black Marxism*. Drawing from Cox and Ray Huang, not unlike what he did with Dubois, James, and Wright, Robinson deconstructed bourgeois historiography, illustrating how Cox (and secondarily Huang) would “reconfigure radically the episteme of the West.” The next essay, “Fascism and the Intersections of Capitalism, Racism, and Historical Consciousness,” delineates one of Robinson’s major historical excavations and analytic commitments – the study of fascism and Black people’s resistance to it. It is also one of several essays where Robinson interrogated fascism as a familiar species of North America. Examining the responses to fascism in the 1920s in the U.S., Robinson argued that the American revisionist history of anti-fascist movements reflects a deep commitment to the erasure of not only the complicity of American capital and European fascism that translated to open support for fascist regimes, but also the fierce anti-fascist responses from Black people in the African Diaspora. Unlike their white counterparts, for many Black people, “the historical significance of fascism was clear: at home it foreshadowed the descent of liberalism ... elsewhere it meant the destruction of even the symbols of racial liberation.” First appearing in *Humanities in Societies* in 1983, “Fascism at the Intersections” signaled Robinson’s sustained interrogation of fascism as a species and its progenitors, including white supremacy.

First published as a book chapter in *Multiculturalism* edited by David Theo Goldberg in 1994 and within the context of a well-financed backlash against multiculturalism and gender and ethnic studies, “Ota Benga through Geronimo’s

Eyes” tells a story of racism and white supremacy masquerading as science. This science, despite itself, reveals a sub-disciplinary research of multiculturalism, that is, “a concomitant to the domestic sites of Western slave economies and female subordination, and imperialism and colonialism in the outlands ...” Because this iteration of multiculturalism has been an aspect of Western social sciences “since their inceptions,” Robinson suggested a need to explore “what alternative significations of multiculturalism might presently be embraced by the social sciences and why.” One revelation might be that the contemporary anti-democratic attacks against multiculturalism and related fields of studies are the work of the “racial fabulists,” so that they may “continue to preserve their systems of knowledge for as long as the social order which they ‘legitimate’ endures.”

Robinson followed up this insightful read of the contemporary attack on multiculturalism as anti-democratic with “Slavery and the Platonic Origins of Anti-democracy,” tracing this anti-democracy to one of its earliest origins. Extending Cynthia Farrar’s arguments in *The Origins of Democratic Thinking*,²⁵ Robinson located contemporary, liberal anti-democratic predisposition to Plato – the West’s philosophical epiphenomenon and one whose “articulations of a racial social order convalesced the proximity of slavery and liberty.” The placement of “freedom *and* injustice,” central to Robinson’s delineation of early Black and Native American resistance in the U.S.,²⁶ is traced here to Plato’s canon. Interrogating Plato’s most influential work, *The Republic*, as a “sustained attack on democracy,” Robinson concluded that the contemporary theorizing of democracy “did not so much appropriate Plato but rather mirrored its Plato genealogy.”

ON WORLD POLITICS AND U.S. FOREIGN POLICY

As a public intellectual, Robinson drew from his research, teaching, and community engagement, especially in the form of media activism. Indeed, one of the most underexplored areas of Robinson’s scholarship is his sustained interest in and commitment to the study of world politics and U.S. foreign policy. In addition to his research and teaching, and for more than three decades, Robinson was also a Regular Correspondent of the longest running community access TV show in the U.S., *Third World News Review*²⁷ (co-founded and hosted by Elizabeth Robinson, KCSB, and Santa Barbara Channels, 1979) and a regular guest on several long running radio public affairs programs on KCSB FM Santa Barbara (*Viewpoints*, 1980; *No Alibis*, 1996). In these appearances, Robinson provided needed coverage of political developments, largely ignored by the American foreign press, and imbued them with astute and cogent analyses, frequently accompanied by extended historical

elaborations. His collaboration with Elizabeth Robinson, a media producer and activist for over four decades, provided a model to counter the corporate media monopoly – the necessity of moving beyond media criticism to media production. This section thus showcases Robinson’s meticulous research and his work as a scholar activist, featuring a sample of Robinson’s important contributions to a deeper understanding of race, resistance, and U.S. foreign policies.

Advancing a critical theory of fascism, “Fascism and the Response by Black Radical Theorists” extends Robinson’s earlier critique of the erasure of ordinary Black people’s more radical response against fascism in the African Diaspora. Presenting at the African Studies Association Annual Meeting in 1990, he drew attention to the ways in which fascism implicates Black people and Black political thought. Robinson suggested that with the exception of Dubois, “Black radical intellectuals who have been influenced by Marxism held to a materialist conception of fascism.” By not privileging the primacy of class analysis, Dubois in contrast was able to assert a “cultural identity between fascism and the putative democracies.” For Robinson, by insisting that “the essence of fascism was racial,” Dubois’s views approximate those of ordinary Black people who believed “that the West was pathological and fascism an expression of that nature.”

“Africa: In Hoc to History and the Banks,” a reprint from a local newspaper, *News & Reviews* (1985), typifies Robinson’s sustained media analysis made available to the general public through his reporting for various local TV and radio programs.²⁸ Emblematic of Robinson’s systematic critiques of U.S. foreign policies and the media is his keen attention to the historical fictions being manufactured by a complicit, corporate media. This short essay drew attention to the *Los Angeles Times* series on Africa, “Africa – The Harsh Realities Dim Hope,” highlights the ways in which political developments in Africa, especially economic and political crises, are typically distorted to mask non-African and neocolonial interests, including international financial institutions, such as the International Monetary Fund.

Robinson’s study of terrorism as a phenomenon began well before the advent of “September 11th” and included state-sponsored terrorism. “The Comedy of Terror,” published in *Radical History Review* in 2003, pointed to the spectacles of terror against the peoples of Palestine by Israel and against the people of Latin America and elsewhere by the U.S. government. Robinson noted that most people in the world “recognize the American government’s hypocrisy on terrorism,” even as the American corporate-owned press chronically failed to interrogate state terrorism. This failure, Robinson argued, is part of the larger stratagem of misinforming the American public.

This section ends with “Ralph Bunche and the American Dilemma,” a lectured given at Boston University in 1994, illustrating Robinson’s larger

critique of U.S. foreign policies as a concomitant of racial capitalism and white supremacy.²⁹ Using the 60th anniversary of the publication of Gunnar Myrdal's *The American Dilemma* as an entry, Robinson drew attention to Ralph Bunche's "collaboration" on the "Negro Study" portion of the book to delineate Bunche's more radical critique of U.S. racism and racial capitalism. Building on Bunche's analytics, Robinson argued that "fascism, imperialism, and racism were intertwined."

ON REALITY AND ITS (MIS)REPRESENTATIONS

This section elaborates Robinson's keen interests in the media, but also reveals his nearly four decades of research and teaching on critical representation studies beyond film studies. This investigation's focus is much broader than *Forgeries* would suggest. Accordingly, this section showcases a rich sample of Robinson's critical representations studies, including print and electronic media as well as film and performance studies. Similar to the previous section, these essays also illustrate Robinson's persistent attention to U.S. foreign policies and his sustained critique of American imperialism and its varied manifestations.

"White Signs in Black Times: The Politics of Representation in Dominant Texts," was written for the "Conference on Black Theorizing Post-Modernism and Post Structuralism," at UC Santa Barbara in 1989, organized by the Center for Black Studies, where Robinson was a Director for many years. In this essay, Robinson investigated the trend that thematically moved away from racial Blackness and replaced it with the codification, "African-American." This new signifier, he argued, was the Black intelligentsia's response to the "peripheralization of the most audacious expression of Black bourgeois political ambition in American history." Using Jesse Jackson's 1988 presidential campaign as an instantiation of the aspirations and investments of that social class, Robinson maintained that "in their eagerness to seize upon a negotiable historical identity the broker intelligentsia has rendered meaningless the relentless litany of instances in American social, cultural and legal history where race marked the boundaries of polity."

"The American Press and the Repairing of the Philippines," published in *Race & Class* in 1986, extended Robinson's critiques of American imperialism and the corporate press. Using a concept from mass communications literature, "journalistic repair," Robinson examined this practice where the news is "fixed up" to fit a desired narrative. This repairing of news or news normalization belies journalistic claims of truth, seeking and refiguring events so that they are not at risk of revealing "ideologically unacceptable meanings of the event, or to lay bare the fact of mediation itself." Pointing to the collapse of the Ferdinand Marcos regime as an example, Robinson illustrated the ways in which the

popular revolution in the Philippines was evicted from news account in order to dramatize the “revolving elites” and to provide a “neat drama [that] is almost totally unrelated to real-world occurrences.”

The late 1990s, Rampart Scandal, involving widespread corruption by the police, particularly the Community Resources Against Street Hoodlums (CRASH) of the Los Angeles Police Department’s Rampart Division, typifies numerous police scandals in the U.S. throughout the next several decades. At the time, the Rampart Scandal was the most notorious, including police violence, torture, and homicide along with planting false evidence, thefts, and drug deals. When the Rampart Scandal broke wide open, Robinson regularly provided cogent news coverage and analyses on *TWNR* and *No Alibis*. These reports anticipated many contemporary critical police and prison studies. “On the Los Angeles Times, Crack Cocaine, and the Ramparts Division Scandal” is an example of such work. Previously unpublished, this 1999 essay briefly examines the failure of the *Los Angeles Times* to adequately cover lethal corruption in its own hometown. The CIA connection to the crack cocaine epidemic in Los Angeles exposed by Gary Webb of the *San Jose Mercury News*, and the soft-soaping of the corruption in the LAPD Ramparts Division are two such instances.

While Robinson mostly avoided the star-driven academic speaking circuit, he was one of the most gracious public intellectuals, and frequently accepted student invitations from smaller venues such as community colleges. As part of the larger Black History Month celebration at Skyline College in San Bruno (CA) in 2003, Robinson’s presentation explored the films of an early Black cinema giant, Oscar Micheaux and anticipated Robinson’s later interrogation of films and theater in *Forgeries*. Before the advent of video streaming and the “rediscovery” of early Black films, his spotlight on the works of Micheaux and others provided much-needed attention to the largely ignored contributions of early Black filmmakers. “Micheaux Lynches the Mammy” thus explored Micheaux’s films as a response to racial violence and the unrelentingly racist and canonical Hollywood films, including D. W. Griffith’s *Birth of a Nation*. Using the iconic figure of the mammy, Robinson showed the ways in which Micheaux radically recuperated Black womanhood from Griffith’s racist fantasies. Whereas Griffith’s mammy is “a stock character among similarly grotesque Black domestic servants in American films,” Micheaux “extracts the *Mammy* from the lore of plantocratic apologetics, establishing her not as some sort of fictional creature ... but as a mother capable of familial love and anguish” whose faith and loyalty are attached to Black people’s visions of justice and freedom.

In 1998, nearly a decade before the publication of *Forgeries*, Robinson interrogated Black representations in American films in *Race & Class* essay, “Blaxploitation and the Misrepresentation of Liberation.” It centered on

Blaxploitation films as a genre with specific cultural and historical pedagogical functions. Robinson argued that Blaxploitation is “degraded cinema.” In constructing a genre of an “urban jungle,” the American film industry not only degraded itself, but also everyone involved in the process – the Black actors, writers, directors, and audience. Most detrimental of all, Blaxploitation films caricatured the Black lower classes and made “a mockery of the aspirations of Black liberationists.” Robinson leveled a similar critique at the 1990s neo-Blaxploitation films, and maintained that they were not an improvement over their previous incarnations (1969–1975). Instead, these neo-Blaxploitation films were merely “rehearsing the insults of the first.”

Tiffany Willoughby Herard and others³⁰ have testified eloquently to Robinson’s pedagogy as a scholar teacher who was always intentional about co-learning and collaboration. Robinson frequently modeled the conduct of research and social inquiries by being transparent about his research techniques and his analytic stratagems. He also did not privilege graduate student research over undergraduate work. “The Mulatta on Film: From Hollywood to the Mexican Revolution,” a collaboration with his undergraduate student, Luz Maria Cabral, exemplifies this approach to teaching and mentoring, even as it extended Robinson’s focus on Black filmic misrepresentations. It investigated the figure of the Mulatta and provided a rich exposition of the ways in which this figure troubles the popular, filmic, and political imaginaries in the U.S. and Mexico. Robinson and Cabral observed that, “the mulatto has constituted a threat to North American racial hierarchy, property and authority for more than three-hundred years.” They maintained that, especially for Hollywood, the Mulatta represents “a narrative or esthetic disturbance.” Robinson and Cabral thus turned to Mexican Cinema to glean a more adequate understanding of this trope. Focusing on *La Negra Angustias* (1949) and *Los Angelitos Negros* (1948), they argued that these films diverge “from the standard tragic Mulatta representations of Hollywood,” and even to some extent are able to create Black female characters that have fuller “agency and range of emotion and activity that, hitherto, most/Black filmic representations had been denied.”

This section ends with a reprint from a difficult to find book, *The Black and Green Atlantic* (2009), edited by Peter O’Neill and David Lloyd. “Ventriloquizing Blackness: Eugene O’Neill and Irish-American Racial Performance” centers on O’Neill’s *Emperor Jones* and furthers Robinson’s analysis of racial regimes in American film and theater. Eugene O’Neill is considered a singular influence on the emergence of American theater in the twentieth century. This largely uncritical assessment, Robinson argued, has been substantiated mostly by the use of “interior” treatments of O’Neill’s works. In contrast, when we take up the “Negro plays” (1914–1924) we find that O’Neill appropriated many of the performative materials developed by Irish-American black-face minstrels in the nineteenth century’s antebellum period. Robinson maintained that, “what

did distinguish these characters is not so much their novelty in O'Neill's work but that he inserted them into American dramatic theater in a transformative moment in the country's racial regimes." These works (beginning with *Thirst* and concluding with *All God's Chillun*) coincided with social and historical events of critical significance to the (mis)representation of Black people in American popular culture, and remarked on an era which is radically alternative to the "love and theft" relations between Irish-American and Black communities of the previous century. So in the end, O'Neill "gave lie to Black self-governance," Robinson concluded, and "*The Emperor Jones* became the real, and the real was drowned out by O'Neill's voice and his tom-toms."

ON RESISTANCE AND REDEMPTION

The final section spans over four decades of Robinson's uninterrupted attention to the study of popular resistance against racial capitalism, white supremacy, and other big and small tyrannies. Ranging from the 1972, "Malcolm Little as a Charismatic Leader," a rare and difficult to find essay that anticipates his book-length study on order and the myth of leadership, to the unpublished short entry, "On the Truth and Reconciliation Commission" that alludes to his news reporting and analysis, these essays embody Robinson's magnificent analytics to aid us in our quest to conceptualize "what we were, what we are, what we are becoming." Traveling across time and space, they collectively attest to Robinson's unwavering faith in the righteousness of the moral authority of popular resistance against tyranny, and his gracious rendering of the ordinary men and women who people the many chapters of his radical, democratic social philosophy.

In one of his earliest studies of charismatic leadership, Robinson focuses on Malcolm Little (or the making of Malcolm X) to delineate his theory on charisma and political leadership. This analytical framework would be extended in *Terms*. Key to "mass charismatic event," Robinson argued, are two phenomena relating to identity: "political leaders – or men who *need* to lead desperately, and the other with the historical evolution of moments in the lives of members of communities where they require this particular form of leadership." Reading Malcolm X as a mass charismatic event, Robinson suggested that "as important as [Malcolm] was becoming to the lives of those before whom he spoke and for whom he spoke, they were assuming grander proportions in his life," and more cogently, "Malcolm needed them for they were the fulfillment of his vision." In other words, without the collectivity, a leader's vision is for naught.

Turning his attention to "The Appropriation of Frantz Fanon," Robinson eviscerated the *fin de siècle* Fanon Renaissance for its negligence of history, among other things. Published in *Race & Class* in 1993, this essay took postcolonial studies to task by exposing its selective rediscovery of Fanon's

oeuvre. Robinson's critique of the "appropriation of Fanon," especially the selective few chapters from *Black Skin, White Mask*, by literary theorists centers on these scholars' tendency to erase not only the larger historical context of anti-colonial struggles that animated Fanon's work, but also Fanon's later and deeper understanding of the dialectic of colonialism and liberation. Robinson argued that while Fanon "mistook a racial subject for his own class – those he terms the 'nationalist bourgeoisie,'" the academician theorists of today, as representatives of that class, "have sought selectively to re-appropriate and apportion Fanon for a post-or anti-revolutionary class-specific initiative."

One of Robinson's earliest and influential writings, "Amilcar Cabral and the Dialectic of Portuguese Colonialism" was published in 1982 in the now defunct, *Indian Political Science Journal* out of the University of Delhi. This essay revealed his investment in reading resistance as an informant of history, and drew attention to his analytic facility with culture as mobilizing resources – a critical element in his appreciation of Cabral as a political theorist. Robinson differentiated Cabral's work as one of the foremost radical thinkers in the twentieth century from Cabral's African contemporaries. Here, he also distinguished between revolutionary movements and national independence movements. Through in-depth coverage of the heady events of the years when the African Party for the Independence of Guinea and Cape Verde (PAIGC) waged a revolution against fascistic Portuguese colonialism, Robinson systematically argued that Cabral's revolutionary theory and praxis emerged "from national liberation struggles which were consciously revolutionary" rather than ones merely for political independence. He showed that national independence as a matter of juridical reforms was "an imperialist initiative" in the service of "the imperialist and capitalist camp." Drawing attention to Cabral's emphasis on culture and the idea that "national liberation required the complete destruction of foreign domination," Robinson's analysis of Cabral's revolutionary thought and praxis remains one of the most important studies of Cabral's work today.

In "Race, Capitalism, and the Anti-democracy," a chapter in *Reading Rodney King/Reading Urban Uprising* edited by Robert Gooding Williams, Robinson turned his attention to popular rebellions closer to home. More than twenty-five years after its publication in 1993, and within the context of Movements for Black Lives, Robinson's astute analysis of the urban uprisings in the aftermath of the Simi Valley verdict in the trial of the police beating of Rodney King is both timely and prescient. Robinson insisted then that "the naked images of 'law enforcement' applying civilizing discipline to King appeared seductively familiar to the American audience ... [cascading] backward and forward to the recent and not-so-distant past as an inadvertent mimicry of the info-tech-war in the Persian Gulf and prior instances of Pax Americana." It is within this context that Robinson read the campaign of protests associated with the verdict

as an “urban uprising” against the anti-democracy that was “as old (and current) as poverty and injustice,” and, therefore, “no one living in America had the right to be surprised” by such mobilization.

For Robinson, the study of the history of the modern world is necessarily also a history of Black ontologies, alternative epistemologies, and rebellions. Consistent in much of Robinson’s work is also the idea that critical social inquiry must avail itself for emancipatory social action. This scholarly ethos is especially clear in Robinson’s recuperation of David Walker as a progenitor of Black radicalism. In “David Walker’s and the Precepts of Black Studies,” a public address at *The Black Studies Conference* at Ohio State University in 1997, Robinson maintained that Walker should be considered one of the earliest architects of Black Studies and credited him with introducing precepts that make emancipatory Black Studies viable. Robinson provided a systematic reading and an assessment of David Walker’s *Appeal* (1829/1830) as “a messianic pamphlet” aimed at emancipating Black people (“slave and free”) by “merging Christianity, pan-Africanism, and national birth-right.” Despite recent interests and in contrast to foundational texts, Robinson concluded that Walker “cannot be easily appropriated because he is non-modern. He existed within a trans-historically moral and existential universe, which can only be made to partially coincide with either Black nationalism, Black radicalism, or Black liberalism.” Rather than relegating him to the margins of the field, Robinson insisted that, Black Studies should take up Walker’s precepts “to be emancipatory and populist, employing inquiry for the purpose of mobilizing for deliberate and informed social actions.” In short, a Black Studies in the company of the likes of Walker can avail itself for emancipatory, liberationist, social action.

In one of his last publications, Robinson collaborated with Elizabeth Robinson and again, turned their attention to the media to critique mainstream news coverage as well as authoritarian policing. “The Killing in Ferguson” appeared in *Commonware* in 2014,³¹ and provided an outline on the official narrative about “post-racial” America. Written in the immediate aftermath of the police murder of Michael Brown, the crime is examined as an ordinary event in the U.S., which at the time counted an average of two such murders a day. Juxtaposing this “domestic” media event with the failure of U.S. media to note the level of violence directed at Palestinians by the Israeli state, Robinson and Robinson pointed toward the militarization of policing that exacerbated the tendency to social control and authoritarian policing.

This collection concludes with a conference paper, “On the Truth and Reconciliation Commission,” presented in South Africa in 1999 just as the TRC’s work was concluding and being made public. Examining the TRC and its news coverage, Robinson briefly drew attention to the relationship between truth and justice, and maintained that, “Truth can never be exchanged for or even equated with justice for they exist within different knowledge universes.”