

Chapter Title: INTRODUCTION: QUEERING BLACK STUDIES/"QUARING" QUEER STUDIES
Chapter Author(s): E. PATRICK JOHNSON and MAE G. HENDERSON

Book Title: Black Queer Studies
Book Subtitle: A Critical Anthology
Book Editor(s): E. PATRICK JOHNSON, MAE G. HENDERSON
Published by: Duke University Press. (2005)
Stable URL: <https://www.jstor.org/stable/j.ctv11cw38r.5>

JSTOR is a not-for-profit service that helps scholars, researchers, and students discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content in a trusted digital archive. We use information technology and tools to increase productivity and facilitate new forms of scholarship. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

Your use of the JSTOR archive indicates your acceptance of the Terms & Conditions of Use, available at <https://about.jstor.org/terms>



JSTOR

Duke University Press is collaborating with JSTOR to digitize, preserve and extend access to *Black Queer Studies*

.....

**E. PATRICK JOHNSON AND
MAE G. HENDERSON**

.....

**INTRODUCTION:
QUEERING BLACK STUDIES/
“QUARING” QUEER STUDIES**

Black Queer Studies serves as a critical intervention in the discourses of black studies and queer studies. In seeking to interanimate both black studies and queer studies, this volume stages a dialogic and dialectic encounter between these two liberatory and interrogatory discourses. Our objective here is to build a bridge and negotiate a space of inquiry between these two fields of study while sabotaging neither and enabling both. To this end, we have put into dialogue a group of critics, writers, scholars, and cultural producers whose work links the twentieth-century achievements of black studies—a field that came of age in the 1970s and 1980s—with that of the still-emergent field of queer studies. The essays collected here reflect the scholarship of a broad range of theorists and cultural workers who principally engage black lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender studies. Many of these essays were first presented at the Black Queer Studies in the Millennium conference held at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill on April 4–6, 2000. But for the sake of inclusiveness, some essays not presented at the conference but representing the work of the attendees have been incorporated; and still others have been added to broaden and complement the disciplinary and methodological range and scope of the collection.

Although these essays span diverse disciplines and deploy multiple methodologies, they only begin to mine the rich theoretical terrain of black studies as it intersects with queer studies. Notably, many of the authors included in this volume are in the humanities as opposed to the social sciences, a bias that is a reflection of the background of the editors rather than a deliberate

omission. Our goal, however, is to make disciplinary boundaries more permeable and thereby encourage border crossings between the humanities and social sciences. As such, the focus of inquiry here tends to be less on the formal disciplinary training of our contributors and more on the interdisciplinary intellectual content of their scholarship. Nevertheless, while some authors write from paradigms reflecting a perspective and training in the social sciences and/or the humanities, others deploy social science methodologies despite their affiliation with the humanities. Moreover, much of the interventionist work in the areas of race and sexuality has come out of the humanities and not the social sciences. Indeed, social science fields such as sociology have often been antagonistic toward African American culture and nonnormative sexualities in ways that have, according to Roderick Ferguson, “excluded and disciplined those formations that deviate from the racial ideal of heteropatriarchy.”¹

This collection of essays, then, represents a diverse range of critical and theoretical postures as well as a cross-section of disciplinary and interdisciplinary perspectives, including English literature, film studies, black studies, sociology, history, political science, legal studies, cultural studies, performance studies, creative writing, and pedagogical studies. More specifically, this volume is intended to provide students, scholars, and teachers with critical insight into the various and multiple intersections of race, class, gender, and sexuality as each section addresses issues of institutional, disciplinary, and interdisciplinary formations, including public policy, performance studies, pedagogical praxis, literary studies, and cultural studies. In addition, we hope that these dialogues will provide insight into the category of “queer” in raced communities outside the academy.

In its current configuration, the volume’s content is clearly centered within the regional context of the United States. Nonetheless, we are aware of the very important implications of diaspora and postcolonial studies relative to black American sexuality. We are also conscious of the sometimes narcissistic and insular theorizing of U.S.-based academics who do not thoroughly engage the impact of globalization and U.S. imperialism on the transnational flows of racialized sexuality. Indeed, in his essay in this volume Rinaldo Walcott advocates a “diaspora reading practice” that would push the black studies project beyond a “‘neat’ national project” and suggests that black diaspora queers have already begun to push some of those boundaries. Mindful of Walcott’s critique of black studies’ nationalism, our focus here primarily on U.S. racialized sexual politics is not meant to be totalizing or polemic but

rather strategic. Black queer studies is a nascent field and we feel compelled to prioritize a concomitant embryonic theoretical discussion within U.S. borders in order to make an intervention “at home,” as it were. What follows, then, is a brief history aimed at exposing the ways in which black studies and queer studies have heretofore eclipsed each other. The ultimate goal here is to demonstrate how both might be pressed into the service of a larger project—one imbricating race, class, gender, and sexuality.

Various named “black studies,” “Afro-American studies,” “Africana studies” and “African American studies,” programs and departments demarcating this disciplinary formation emerged in the late 1960s and early 1970s, due largely to the efforts of black students and faculty who petitioned, sat in, protested, and otherwise brought pressure to bear on white administrators at predominately white institutions of higher learning around the United States. After marking over thirty years of academic institutionalization, many of these departments and programs now assume leading roles in shaping canons and intellectual currents, as well as the main corpus of research on race in the United States and the diaspora. Not coincidentally, the Civil Rights and Black Power movements of this period provided the historical backdrop and social street scene fueling the interventions staged on the manicured lawns of the ivory tower. Nor was it a coincidence that the political and rhetorical strategies of the larger race and rights movement were deployed by intellectual and cultural activists demanding institutional support for the formation of black studies. Unfortunately, it was precisely this discursive maneuvering—largely formulated by the dominant black male leadership—that provided the anchor for an exclusionary agenda that effectively cordoned off all identity categories that were not primarily based on race.

Most conspicuous in these race-based arrangements, perhaps, was the manifestation of a distinct gender-sex hierarchy. Black heterosexual male leadership in the black studies movement either ignored or relegated to secondary status the experiences and contributions of black women who most often were expected to “stand by their men” in the academic struggle for race rights. Such blatant sexism and, in some cases, downright misogyny in the academy occluded the specificity of black women’s experiences and contributions to and within black studies, at the level of both departmental formations and programs of study. Black women’s institutional work as well as intellectual interventions in black studies departments remained understudied, devalued, or marginalized by the reigning black male theorists who deemed “race” to be the proper sphere of study.

Black feminist theorists, including Alice Walker, Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, Barbara Smith, Cheryl Clarke, Audre Lorde, Toni Cade Bambara, and Angela Davis, among others, worked to fill in the lacunae created by the omission of black women from the historical narrative of black studies. Notably, more than a few of these early interventionists were lesbians who sought not only to combat the sexism and homophobia within the Civil Rights and black studies movements, but also the racism and sexism within emergent women's rights and feminist studies movements. Gloria T. Hull, Patricia Bell Scott, and Barbara Smith's anthology, *All the Women Are White, All the Blacks Are Men, But Some of Us Are Brave* (1982), captures the status of black women within black studies and women's studies in the early days of their disciplinary formations.

Given the status of women (and class not lagging too far behind) within black studies, it is not surprising that sexuality, and especially homosexuality, became not only a repressed site of study within the field, but also one with which the discourse was paradoxically preoccupied, if only to deny and disavow its place in the discursive sphere of black studies. On the one hand, the category of (homo)sexuality, like those of gender and class, remained necessarily subordinated to that of race in the discourse of black studies, due principally to an identitarian politics aimed at forging a unified front under racialized blackness. On the other hand, the privileging of a racist discourse demanded the deployment of a sexist and homophobic rhetoric in order to mark, by contrast, the priority of race. While black (heterosexual) women's intellectual and community work were marginalized, if not erased, homosexuality was effectively "theorized" as a "white disease" that had "infected" the black community.² In fact, sexuality as an object of discourse circulated mainly by way of defensive disavowals of "sexual deviance," frequently framed by outspoken heterosexual black male intellectuals theorizing the "black male phallus" in relation to "the black (w)hole" and other priapic riffs sounding the legendary potency of the heterosexual black man or, alternatively, bewailing his historical emasculation at the hands of overbearing and domineering black women.³ It would be some time, as Audre Lorde discovered in the bars of New York during her sexual awakening, before black studies would come "to realize that [its] place was the very house of difference rather than the security of any one particular difference."⁴

Codified as a disciplinary discourse some twenty years later than black studies, queer studies—like black studies and feminist studies—emerged in the academy as the intellectual counterpart and component of another activ-

ist movement, namely that of ACT-UP, an AIDS activist group, and its offshoot group Queer Nation. The political strategies of Queer Nation were strikingly similar to those employed in the Civil Rights movement, in that in its aim to speak to and on behalf of the oppression of sexual dissidents, other identity markers remained subordinated, if not erased. And, like the essentially identitarian politics propelling its political counterpart, queer studies/theory tended toward totalization and homogenization as well. Again, however, interventions by feminist theorists like Eve Sedgwick, Sue-Ellen Case, Diana Fuss, Teresa de Lauretis, and Judith Butler, to name a few, sought to correct queer theory's myopia by broadening its analytic lens to include a focus on gender.⁵ Whether queer theory "engenders" difference (gay vs. lesbian) or "ungenders" ("queers") difference, it is not assured, according to social theorist Scott Bravmann, "that we will see the multiple social differences which are always there right alongside of gender and which are themselves integral to sexual identities and the performativity of gender."⁶ Further, as Lisa Duggan reminds us, "any gay politics based on the primacy of sexual identity defined as unitary and 'essential,' residing clearly, intelligibly and unalterably in the body or psyche, and fixing desire in a gendered direction, ultimately represents the view from the subject position '20th-century Western white gay male.'"⁷ In other words, essentialist identity politics often reinforces hegemonic power structures rather than dismantling them.

Despite its theoretical and political shortcomings, queer studies, like black studies, disrupts dominant and hegemonic discourses by consistently destabilizing fixed notions of identity by deconstructing binaries such as heterosexual/homosexual, gay/lesbian, and masculine/feminine as well as the concept of heteronormativity in general. Given its currency in the academic marketplace, then, queer studies has the potential to transform how we theorize sexuality in conjunction with other identity formations.⁸ Yet, as some theorists have noted, the deconstruction of binaries and the explicit "unmarking" of difference (e.g., gender, race, class, region, able-bodiedness, etc.) have serious implications for those for whom these other differences "matter."⁹ Lesbians, gays, bisexuals, and transgendered people of color who are committed to the demise of oppression in its various forms, cannot afford to theorize their lives based on "single-variable" politics. As many of the essays in this volume demonstrate, to ignore the multiple subjectivities of the minoritarian subject within and without political movements and theoretical paradigms is not only theoretically and politically naive, but also potentially dangerous. In the context of an expansive American imperialism

in which the separation of church and state (if they ever really were separate) remains so only by the most tenuous membrane and in which a sitting president homophobically refers to as “sinners” certain U.S. citizens seeking the protection of marriage, the so-called axis of evil is likely to cut across every identity category that is not marked white, Anglo-Saxon, Protestant, heterosexual, American, and male.

Thus, we hope that the interanimation of these two disciplines—black studies and queer studies—whose roots are similarly grounded in social and political activism, carries the potential to overcome the myopic theorizing that has too often sabotaged or subverted long-term and mutually liberatory goals. As a productive and progressive political and analytical paradigm, the intersectionality of black and queer studies marks not only a Kuhnian paradigm shift, but also a generational shift mandated by the complexity of contemporary subjectivities. Monolithic identity formations, like monologic perspectives, cannot survive the crisis of (post)modernity. In today’s cultural marketplace, the imperatives of race and sexuality must give way to messier but more progressive stratagems of contestation and survival. Therefore, as we see it, our project here is fundamentally a liberatory one—in the sense that it is grounded in the assertion of individual rights balanced by communal accountability in the interest of ensuring social justice. And “social justice inclusive of sexuality,” argues Mark Blasius, “can only be conceptualized or enacted from explicit recognition of the relationships between sexual oppression and the oppression of other disenfranchised groups and coalition with them on the basis of our intersecting identities of class, gender, age, sexual orientation, ‘able’- (and desirable-) bodiedness, race, and ethnicity, among others.”¹⁰ Toward this aim, our collection seeks to enlist the strategies, methodologies, and insights of black studies into the service of queer studies and vice versa.

Further, we seek to animate this dialogic/dialectic “kinship” by mobilizing the tensions embedded in the conjunction of “black” and “queer” in the title of this volume. Some have suggested that the conjoining of the modifier “black” to the noun “queer” potentially subverts the governing concept organizing the notion of “queer.” Michael Warner, for example, suggests that “queer” represents “an aggressive impulse of generalization; [that] it rejects a minoritizing logic of toleration or simple political interest-representation in favor of a more thorough resistance to regimes of the normal.”¹¹ Arguably, then, the attachment of the modifier risks reinstalling boundaries of exclusion in a project that professes as its goal the notion of broad inclusivity.

Nonetheless—and at the risk of seeming to create divisiveness when unity and community are the overriding goals—we believe that the term “black queer” captures and, in effect, names the specificity of the historical and cultural differences that shape the experiences and expressions of “queerness.” Just as Warner argues that “people want to make theory queer, not just have a theory about queers,” we want to *quare* queer—to throw shade on its meaning in the spirit of extending its service to “blackness.”¹² Further, we believe that there are compelling social and political reasons to lay claim to the modifier “black” in “black queer.” Both terms, of course, are markers or signifiers of difference: just as “queer” challenges notions of heteronormativity and heterosexism, “black” resists notions of assimilation and absorption. And so we endorse the double cross of affirming the inclusivity mobilized under the sign of “queer” while claiming the racial, historical, and cultural specificity attached to the marker “black.”

This volume is divided into four parts, each of which activates the tensions between “black” and “queer.” In the first part, “Disciplinary Tensions: Black Studies/Queer Studies,” the essays explore the ways in which black studies has historically elided issues of (homo)sexuality and/or how queer studies has elided issues of race. The authors address this topic from different perspectives, including the examination of specific historical moments in the formation of both disciplines; as well as the interrogation of the “value” lodged and embedded in the terms that “overdetermine” their signification or offer trajectories for what we designate as “black queer studies” or black “gay” studies, if it turns out that “queer” does not signal the inclusiveness it proposes. The authors also question the effectiveness of queer studies in addressing issues of public policy that have had a direct impact on gays, lesbians, bisexuals, and transgendered people of color. The authors address how race does or does not factor into queer political organizing, how issues of poverty, homelessness, and health care affect the black gay community, and how institutional social science disciplinary formations further veify racial and sexual exclusionary practices.

Part 1 opens with Cathy Cohen’s “Punks, Bulldaggers, and Welfare Queens: The Radical Potential of Queer Politics?” which explores the ways that queer theorists and queer activists, in an effort to deconstruct and challenge seemingly stable and normalizing categories of sexuality, have at times reinforced an ineffective and deceptive dichotomy between heterosexual and “queer.” Despite claims to complicate our understanding of sexuality in general, including the category “heterosexual,” some queer theorists, in particular queer

activists, write and act in ways that homogenize everything that is publicly identifiable as heterosexual and most things that are understood to be “queer.” What is left unexamined, according to Cohen, is the true distribution of power and privilege within these categories and how access to dominant power and resources structures the politics and radical possibilities of subjects existing on both sides of this dichotomy. Ultimately, Cohen is interested in the process through which we construct a politics that is truly liberating and transformative, inclusive of all those who stand on the (out)side of the dominant normalized ideal of state-sanctioned, white, middle- and upper-class male heterosexuality. Thus, central to this new politics is an understanding of the ways in which, for instance, race, class, and/or gender interact with sexuality to destabilize a monolithic understanding of such labels/categories as gay, heterosexual, or queer.

Roderick A. Ferguson directs focus away from queer activist formations of power and, therefore, exclusionary practices, and toward disciplinary formations and acts of power. In his “Race-ing Homonormativity: Citizenship, Sociology, and Gay Identity,” Ferguson provides a genealogical critique of sexuality as a social construction. Ferguson accepts the claim made by queer sociologists that the discipline of sociology preceded queer studies and cultural studies in articulating the notion of sexuality as a social construction, but he challenges this focus on sexuality as a milestone for the discipline. Instead, he argues, the idea of sexuality as a social construction was invented within the category of ethnicity, which, rather than providing an alternative to race, articulated racial privilege and advanced racial exclusion. Ethnicity, argues Ferguson, transformed previously nonwhite immigrants into white Americans who were eligible for intermarriage with native-born whites. Sexuality as social construction, then, meant that these new immigrants could attain normative sexual and racial status and, therefore, embody American citizenship. Such a genealogy is important if we are to understand contemporary sexual formations, especially among gays and lesbians. Even in this historical moment, sexuality as social construction becomes a way of announcing the assimilability—and thus normativity—of white middle- and upper-class homosexuals as well as a means of excluding working-class and nonwhite queers on the basis of their inability to conform to normative ideals of American citizenship.

Dwight A. McBride’s essay, “Straight Black Studies: On African American Studies, James Baldwin, and Black Queer Studies,” seeks to account for the heterosexist strain in African Americanist discourse by considering the hege-

mony of the institutional politics of respectability while, at the same time, attempting to understand this contested history as part of the unstable past for the emergent discourse of black queer studies. McBride first considers Essex Hemphill, which he follows with a discussion of the centrality of James Baldwin to the vision of a usable past for black queer studies. Finally, he considers some of the challenges this emergent discourse poses to dominant constructions of African American studies as an institutional formation.

Overlapping with McBride's call for a "usable past of black studies," Rinaldo Walcott's essay, "Outside in Black Studies: Reading from a Queer Place in the Diaspora," adds to the black studies/queer studies binary a third disciplinary configuration, diaspora studies, to form a theoretical triumvirate. More specifically, Walcott's essay addresses the question of "respectability" in black studies' encounter with the erotics of black queer studies. Walcott suggests that an erotics of pedagogy or the lack thereof is one of the central concerns for thinking through the politics and pedagogy of black queer studies. Walcott also promotes the potential for black queer studies, to rejuvenate the liberatory possibilities of the black studies project. Alternatively, Walcott suggests that the possibilities of queer studies, as encompassed within black studies, can only act to elaborate the terms of a potential liberation because queer studies disrupts the current agenda of the black studies project by inserting new and different positions. Indeed, Walcott argues that queer positions open up blind spots and offer other ways of seeing that are instructive to the larger questions of blackness. Similarly, black studies offers a corrective for queer studies. In fact, since it is fairly evident that queer studies takes many of its founding mandates from the model of the black studies movements of the 1960s—in particular the constitution of its subjects of study as a minority—it is important to emphasize that black studies can also work to preserve the pertinence of questions of racial difference and its various class formations to a project that has quickly become a "white queer studies project."

Phillip Brian Harper's "The Evidence of Felt Intuition: Minority Experience, Everyday Life, and Critical Speculative Knowledge" focuses on anecdotes of the author's personal experiences both within and outside the academy. In this essay, Harper argues that the social and political import of minority identity must inevitably be teased out from the minority subject's intuitive suspicion concerning his or her treatment during specific encounters with others. Indeed, Harper argues that the very existence of such suspicion itself is a function of the minority condition. Rather than rejecting this

intuitive knowledge as unacceptably “subjective” for the purposes of critical analysis, however, Harper insists that this aspect of minority experience—which derives from nonnormative racial and sexual identities—is a crucial element within the body of “speculative critical knowledge” that arguably comprises all social, cultural, and political critique.

E. Patrick Johnson’s essay, “‘Quare’ Studies, or (Almost) Everything I Know about Queer Studies I Learned from My Grandmother,” shifts the focus from the internal occlusions of sexuality within black studies to the racial and class occlusions within queer studies. In the tradition of black feminist critic Barbara Smith, Johnson’s essay is a manifesto advocating a reconceptualization of queer studies—one that explicitly takes into account suppressed racial and class knowledges. In redefining “queer” as “quare”—his grandmother’s black-dialect inflected pronunciation of “queer”—Johnson seeks to broaden the paradigmatic, theoretical, and epistemological scope of queer studies to include issues facing queers of color who also belong to racialized and classed communities. Johnson argues for a return to a “body politic” that neither reduces identity to a monolithic whole based on an essentialist notion of race or gender, nor elides issues of materiality in which the body becomes the site of trauma (e.g., the site at which racist, sexist, and homophobic violence is enacted). In the course of redefining queer as a concept, the author invokes examples of how (white) queer critics have eluded the question of race in the name of queer theory and how their readings of black queer cultural production are designed, in fact, to fortify the hegemony of white queer subjectivity.

Part 2 of this volume, “Representing the ‘Race’: Blackness, Queers, and the Politics of Visibility” explores the ways in which the black queer body signifies within the American imaginary. The essays here focus specifically on the ways in which blackness and queerness intersect in relation to visual economies undergirded by a politics of visibility that sometimes does and sometimes does not accommodate cultural as well as material privilege both within and outside queer communities. The authors engage these issues by examining the theoretical and political implications of the closet, the politics of outing oneself as a privileged heterosexual, the strategies by which we read queer black bodies and the politics that such readings configure, and the occlusion of black (homo)sexuality in mainstream gay and lesbian film. Opening this discussion is Marlon B. Ross’s essay, “Beyond the Closet as Raceless Paradigm,” in which he considers the ways in which the image and concept of the closet, as it has been articulated instrumentally in queer

history and theory, constructs a racially loaded paradigm of same-sex desire, sexuality, and community. The closet paradigm, argues Ross, locates homosexual identification because it enables a powerful narrative of progress in terms both of the psychosexual development of the individual and of the sociopolitical formation of a legitimate sexual minority group. The closet defines sexual identity as a threshold experience in which one side of the door harbors deprivation and dispossession, while the other side reveals the potential for psychosexual fulfillment and cultural belonging. To be “closeted,” then, is to be silenced and invisible and thus disempowered; to come out of the closet, in contrast, is to assume voice and accountability as well as empowerment. Thus, Ross queries an ideology of the closet as a master paradigm for same-sexual identification and, more specifically, a racial ideology operating in our appeals to the closet. Next, Ross theorizes what happens when the closet is applied as though its operation has no dependence on racial difference or no stake in acts of racial discrimination. Exploring queer theory and queer historiography as it relates to this query, Ross examines Michel Foucault’s historical reconstruction of the modern invention of the homosexual as an anatomical object of sexological investigation in order to understand the racial implications of his historical claims as locally—and thus racially—situated.

Devon Carbado’s project in “Privilege” is to promote a shift in—or at least a broadening of—our conceptualization of discrimination. In general, Carbado aims to expand the notion of what it means to be a perpetrator of discrimination by focusing on those who unquestionably accept their own racial, gender, and heterosexual privileges as well as those who fail to acknowledge their own victimless status vis-à-vis racism, sexism, and homophobia. In arguing that male feminism should focus on challenging male (especially male heterosexual) privilege, Carbado sets forth a strategy by which men can identify and thereby resist privilege, offering tentative suggestions on how such strategies might be deployed.

Kara Keeling’s “‘Joining the Lesbians’: Cinematic Regimes of Black Lesbian Visibility” moves away from the theoretical and cultural politics of visibility to its representation in film. Keeling begins with an examination of how, historically, black queer filmmakers have engaged the project of “making visible” that which has been rendered invisible and silenced. By honing in specifically on the category of the “black lesbian” and her representation in “black lesbian film,” Keeling theorizes the process by which film representations of black queer women unproblematically reify the category “black

lesbian” as if it were a priori, often excluding elements of this same identity that might counter discourses that seek the black lesbian’s demise. Through her reading of Cheryl Dunye’s film *The Watermelon Woman*, Keeling demonstrates what must be made invisible for the “black lesbian” to become “visible,” examining the politics of such a move. Ultimately, Keeling argues that the images that have been purged from “the visible” nevertheless retain the potential to unsettle the hegemonic scopic order and the “common sense” that maintains them intact, although they remain always already vulnerable within the dominant order.

Turning from the black lesbian body to the black gay male body, Charles I. Nero’s “Why Are Gay Ghettos White?” opens by postulating that one of the paradoxes of contemporary gay male life is that homosexuality is considered pancultural, multiclassed, and multiracial even while the overwhelming “whiteness” of the “gay ghettos” contradicts this reality. Further, although critics and scholars comment continuously on this paradox, none, argues Nero, offers even a plausible explanation for it. This discourse of authenticity, as it were, contains the ubiquitous rhetorical figure of the black gay impostor, which Nero examines in films and dramas by white gay and straight filmmakers and dramatists. Nero speculates here that the figure of the black gay impostor conceals the gay ghettos as sites where racial formation occurs by naturalizing and normalizing the exclusion of black gay men. In this sense, the black gay impostor serves a function similar to the “controlling images” of black women that Patricia Hill Collins identifies in the discourse of elite white males (and their spokespersons). As a controlling image of black gay men, the impostor, finally, mediates the paradoxical coexistence of universal homosexuality with homogeneous gay neighborhoods. The impostor signifies a black presence, while, simultaneously, deflecting attention away from the exclusionary practices of racial formation.

Part 3 of this book, “How to Teach the Unspeakable: Race, Queer Studies, and Pedagogy,” engages the issue of how integrating the study of sexuality into the classroom complicates a space that is always already fraught with erotic tensions and negotiations of power. These studies, in different ways, ask what is at stake when black queer pedagogy is mobilized in the academy. The authors in this section engage issues including the politics of outing oneself (or not) to students; how race and sexuality converge and diverge in the classroom space; how to negotiate the erotic tension in the lesbian and gay studies classroom; and the politics of offering “queer” readings of presumably “straight” black texts. In “Embracing the Teachable Moment: The

Black Gay Body in the Classroom as Embodied Text,” Bryant Keith Alexander explores the “tensive” negotiation between the subject positions defined by the black gay male as teacher and that of teaching through the issues of race, culture, and gender. Alexander’s essay struggles with notions of representation, voice, and imperialism in the classroom through its figuration of the black gay body as a “performed”—and, indeed, “embodied” text—signifying in the space of the classroom in multiple and complex ways. And although Alexander offers anecdotal and theoretical evidence from his courses on performance in support of his position, he chooses to conclude with the question: How can one *not* teach about race and sexuality when one’s very presence signals a teachable moment?

Assuming an alternate stance on the politics of pedagogy, at least in terms of taking for granted the queer professor’s openness about his sexuality, Keith Clark’s essay, “Are We Family? Pedagogy and the Race for Queerness,” addresses, head-on, the politics of “outing” oneself in the classroom. By narrating his discomfort at the prospect of revealing his own sexuality to students, Clark ponders the pedagogical value of treading the dangerous waters of what it means to attempt to personally authorize the narratives of gayness and thereby risk essentializing homo(sexuality) in troubling ways. While still committed to unearthing same-gender-loving, or homoerotic, subtexts in African American literature, Clark cautions against pedagogical policing whereby the instructor proscribes and censures students in an effort to foster a “hate-free” atmosphere. Instead, he suggests, such censorship precludes invaluable teaching moments. Ultimately, Clark urges that we not allow the “race for queerness,” or an official, sanctioned queer pedagogical discourse mandating the prioritizing of one identity over another, to eclipse questions of racial/ethnic affiliation, class struggle, and gender by re-closeting the complexity of identity in order to secure an unencumbered queer authenticity.

Maurice O. Wallace’s essay, “On Being a Witness: Passion, Pedagogy, and the Legacy of James Baldwin,” begins where Keith Clark’s leaves off by examining, through a close reading of Baldwin, the knotty relations among black queer texts and the lives of black queer students. Through his reading of selected characters from Baldwin’s fiction, viewed in the context of the author’s equivocation on matters pertaining to Baldwin’s own sexuality, Wallace works through the unpredictable nuances between the pedagogical practices that construct black gay and lesbian studies as a body of knowledge (a field of intellectual inquiry and consumption) and the pedagogical assumption of responsibility for the black gay, lesbian, or bisexual student to protect

their socio-intellectual freedom. Wallace concludes his essay with a call for a pedagogical praxis, albeit theoretically “queer,” in the sense of the term’s recent, although contested, signification of a plurality of dissident sexualities and sex acts. Indeed, the author argues for a pedagogical praxis that is dialogically creative, necessarily undisciplined, and “misbehaviorally” liberatory.

The authors of the essays in part 4, “Black Queer Fiction: Who Is ‘Reading’ Us?,” perform readings of black queer literature, focusing on contemporary and earlier texts by both acclaimed and less well-known authors. While affirming the existence of a long-standing black gay and lesbian literary impulse in African American literature, critics have argued that a recognition of this aspect of the tradition remains well overdue. In a call for the recognition of this neglected but ever-growing tradition, the critics in this section focus on texts that are currently deemed noncanonical. In “But Some of Us Are Lesbians: The Absence of Black Lesbian Fiction,” black lesbian essayist and fiction writer Jewell Gomez argues that the current climate of conglomerate book publishing, distribution, and sales has contributed significantly to the inaudibility of the black lesbian voice that was so expressive in the 1970s and 1980s. According to Gomez, black lesbian literature, and fiction in particular, has been marginalized largely as a result of the increasing popularity of nonfiction in the academy, a shift in focus that has rendered black lesbian voices less accessible in the classroom curriculum. By tracing the historical roots of black lesbian fiction and by demonstrating, along the way, the important contributions of the genre of lesbian fiction to the black literary tradition in general, Gomez demands not only critical attention to, but also the proliferation of, black lesbian fiction through increased publication. The inevitable question that Gomez ponders is how will the readers of tomorrow recognize great black lesbian literature if it is only talked about and not published?

In “James Baldwin’s *Giovanni’s Room*: Expatriation, ‘Racial Drag,’ and Homosexual Panic,” Mae G. Henderson explores the relation between geographical expatriation, racial “drag,” the construction of American nationality and masculinity, and “homosexual panic.” By assuming a posture of literary “whiteness,” Henderson argues, Baldwin is able to launch a critique of dominant ideologies and constructions of nationality and masculinity, assuming—but not naming—whiteness as a category. Such a narrative strategy not only demonstrates the author’s insight into the social and psychological spaces inhabited by whiteness, but also enables Baldwin to avoid provoking white anxieties around issues of race and race relations. Finally, concludes Henderson, Baldwin’s strategy of “narrative passing” constitutes the formal

counterpart to his thematic of “sexual passing,” just as his strategy of authorial race-crossing has its counterpart in a narrative of cultural and national boundary-crossing. In reading Baldwin’s 1950s novel *Giovanni’s Room* against his 1940s essay “Preservation of Innocence,” Henderson argues that the novel constitutes a fictional enactment and elaboration of the author’s critique of the “hardboiled” masculinity depicted in American World War II noir fiction. While insisting on the cultural critique of dominant constructions of gender and gender ideology implicit in Baldwin’s text, Henderson also renders a modernist reading recuperating the “literariness” of the text by locating it in intertextual and revisionary relation to F. Scott Fitzgerald’s great modernist classic *The Great Gatsby* and the traditional thematics of Jamesian American “innocence.”

Faetra Chatard Carpenter takes up the issues of race and sexuality as represented in Robert O’Hara’s contemporary play *Insurrection: Holding History* (1999). In her essay, “Robert O’Hara’s *Insurrection*: ‘Que(e)rying History,’” Carpenter explores how O’Hara’s play uses a queer theoretical paradigm to explore the inherent capaciousness of historical narratives and to dismantle the monolithic authority of “normalizing ideologies.” In O’Hara’s play, Ron, a gay African American graduate student, is transported back into time to Nat Turner’s slave rebellion. His journey, and the paradigm it inscribes, allow O’Hara to critique the notion of a “real” or “authentic” history, offering instead a perception of history’s inherent “queerness”—its varied interpretations, textuality, and multiplicity. By intersecting issues of time, place, space, and perspective, O’Hara contests traditional notions of both history and identity by challenging the compulsive heteronormative acceptance of “authentic” historical narratives and their assumptions regarding classifications of race, sex, and gender. Further, Carpenter argues that O’Hara’s deployment of history, language, dramatic form, and character is punctuated with the aesthetic of “camp” to directly combat traditional perceptions of what is historically “real.” In so doing, O’Hara simultaneously “queers” any singular, authoritative notion of racial and sexual identity. In her analysis of O’Hara’s play, Carpenter demonstrates queer theory’s potential to encompass—and thereby usurp—the critical modes utilized in the studies of other marginalized voices.

The essays collected here not only blur boundaries by queering and querying the foundational modes of knowledge production in the academy and beyond, but also seek to specify some of the borders framing black gay, lesbian, bisexual, and transgendered critical analysis. The creative and imag-

inative strategies with which black queers negotiate the two epistemological sites of queerness and blackness are matched only by the rigor and seriousness with which the scholars in this volume approach their objects of inquiry. The editors are aware that these essays and their authors owe much to the generations on whose work and lived experiences we build to construct a *quare* tradition. And while these essays honor those long since gone and those yet unborn—those who have and those who will dare to break with “traditions” that would constrain individual freedoms—the critics and theorists whose work is presented here caution us always to be wary of political, social, and cultural institutions and practices that maintain the status quo and that portend our marginalization and silence.

NOTES

1. Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003), 18.
2. See Eldridge Cleaver, *Soul on Ice* (New York: Laurel, 1968); George Jackson, *Soledad Brother: The Prison Letters of George Jackson* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970); and Haki Madhubuti, *Black Men: Obsolete, Single, Dangerous? The Afrikan American in Transition: Essays in Discovery, Solution, and Hope* (Chicago: Third World Press, 1990).
3. See Houston A. Baker Jr., *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), 113–99; Cleaver, *Soul on Ice*; Jackson, *Soledad Brother*; and Madhubuti, *Black Men*.
4. Audre Lorde, *Zami: A New Spelling of My Name* (Watertown, Mass.: Persephone Press, 1982), 226.
5. See Scott Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past: History, Culture, and Difference* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 16–19.
6. *Ibid.*, 21.
7. Lisa Duggan, “Making It Perfectly Queer,” *Socialist Review* (1992): 1.
8. In recent years there have been a number of critical anthologies published that focus on either gay and lesbian or “queer” studies, including Henry Abelove, Michelé Aina Barale, and David Halperin, *The Gay and Lesbian Reader* (New York: Routledge, 1993); Joseph Bristow and Angelia R. Wilson, *Activating Theory* (London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1993); Brett Beemyn and Mickey Eliason, *Queer Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 1996); Donald Morton, *The Material Queer* (Boulder: Westview, 1996); and Martin Duberman, *Queer Representations* (New York: New York University Press, 1997). While all of these volumes contain sections on “identity” or present a few token essays by and/or about queers of color, none includes race as an integral component of its analysis.

Other relevant works in the field include Andy Mudhurst and Sally R. Munt's *Lesbian and Gay Studies: A Critical Introduction* (London: Cassell, 1997), a guide defining literary and critical terms in queer studies; Larry Gross and James D. Wood's *The Columbia Reader on Lesbians and Gay Men in Media, Society, and Politics* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), an interesting, albeit eclectic, collection of essays that examines the status of lesbians and gays in the dominant culture and proposes strategies of popular and institutional resistance to this representation; Michael Warner's influential *Fear of a Queer Planet* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993), a volume representing a diverse range of perspectives on the impact of gender and sexuality on politics, theory, and culture; Shane Phelan's *Playing with Fire* (New York: Routledge, 1997), an anthology exploring the intersection between progressive politics and political theory as it addresses issues of queer rights and identities in the context of nation and state; Corey K. Creekmur and Alexander Doty's *Out in Culture* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), which juxtaposes the voices of popular culture critics and producers alongside those of critics and theorists of popular culture; Gordon Brent Ingram, Anne-Marie Bouthillette, and Yolanda Retter's *Queers in Space* (Seattle: Bay Press, 1997), which theorizes the geopolitical places and spaces where queers live, work, and play; Thomas Foster, Carol Siegel, and Ellen E. Berry's *The Gay '90s: Disciplinary and Interdisciplinary Formations in Queer Studies* (New York: New York University Press, 1997), a volume that highlights the tensions between disciplinary and interdisciplinary approaches to queer studies and how they impact the formation of lesbian and gay studies in the academy; and, finally, Michael Lowenthal's *Gay Men at the Millennium* (New York: Penguin, 1997), which proposes a gender-specific approach to the study of queer theory and politics. Although these volumes contribute greatly to the discourses of queer theory, politics, and activism, they either omit race as a category of analysis or, in instances where race is represented, the treatment of it appears to be obligatory or at best perfunctory. And, as valuable as they are, even those volumes that address issues of race, class, and sexuality (e.g., Essex Hemphill's *Brother to Brother*, [Boston: Alyson, 1991] and Joseph Beam's *In the Life*, [Boston: Alyson, 1986]) run the risk of totalizing the black gay experience by privileging black gay men—to the exclusion of black lesbians.

9. See Bravmann, *Queer Fictions of the Past*; Mark Blasius, ed., *Sexual Identities, Queer Politics* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001); and Steven Seidman, *Difference Troubles: Queering Social Theory and Sexual Politics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

10. Blasius, *Sexual Identities, Queer Politics*, 12.

11. Warner, *Fear of Queer Planet*, xxvi.

12. See Johnson's reconceptualization of "queer" as "quare" in his essay in this volume.

