INTRODUCTION

Ed Bullins’s 1971 one-page play, *Malcolm: ’71, or Publishing Blackness*, laments and excoriates the academic domestication of black radicalism, specifically with reference to a white graduate student’s request that a black playwright recommend black poets for inclusion in her planned anthology of radical American literature. Whitegirl tells Blackman she was given Blackman’s name by Professor Hack, “the white professor who teaches black poetry and aesthetics,” hired as a result of student protests for a Black Studies program at the Black Revolutionary Third World City University. “You wouldn’t imagine,” she tells Blackman, “how terribly, terribly radical and revolutionary this book is going to be! . . . And I was hoping that, if you could collect a section for the Blacks . . . I mean the Black poets, of course, well I could meet with you.” Blackman cuts her off, asking who her dog Malcolm (barking in the background throughout) is named for. When she replies, “Malcolm X,” he gently hangs up the phone.¹

Central to this interchange is a concern about the cooptation and domestication of black radicalism and black literature, accompanied by implicit worries about textual reproduction and selection in academic scholarship. As Margo Crawford notes in her discussion of Bullins in this volume’s closing essay, *Malcolm: ’71* “dramatizes the problem of who frames whom and who collects whom.” At the time of the play, textual scholarship was enjoying something of a revival that would last into the 1980s. Black literary study, on the other hand, was just taking off on its post-1960s expansion with a growing number of newly reprinted texts, often in hardback facsimile form out of Arno Press of the *New York Times* or in inexpensive paperback under the aegis of the African/American Library series edited by Charles R. Larson and published by Collier Books. Scholarly editions of African American literature were practically nonexistent.
With its philological roots in the Bible, medieval scrolls, and Shakespeare’s folios and quartos, textual scholarship was slow to come to African American literature, no doubt in part because textual scholarship depended on an academic industry already built up around canonical, white male authors. Groundbreaking editions like the 1969 “genetic text” of Melville’s *Billy Budd (an Inside Narrative)* edited by Harrison Hayford and Merton M. Sealts Jr. could only be justified financially on the basis of a large array of courses in which it might be used in place of a cheaper, even if flawed, edition in a paperback collection of Melville’s stories and novellas. The mammoth CEAA-approved editions of the complete works of Hawthorne, Melville, Whitman, and Howells—none of which was finally completed—took decades of work and plenty of money from soon-strapped university presses. They ended in midstream and went out of print as scholarly publishing lost financial support and viability in the course of the 1980s and after. Indeed, textual scholarship easily appeared out of sync with the French poststructuralist wave sweeping the American academy in the 1970s and 1980s, and generally lost prestige, not to mention market share, in the profession of literary studies as a whole over the last three decades of the twentieth century. African American literary studies, meanwhile, took an opposite trajectory.

While African Americanist scholarship exploded by the turn of the twenty-first century and, some might argue, contributed in some of its forms to the domestication of black literary radicalism, textual scholars—all of them white—lamented that no one seemed to care anymore about what they did. However, as black-authored texts entered the bookstores and the classrooms in expanding numbers, and black literary scholarship became institutionalized, a new interest in issues raised by textual scholars began to appear in African American literary scholarship, and textual scholars began turning to black-authored texts. Certain developments in textual scholarship meshed in interesting ways with central issues in African American literary study. For example, a move away from establishing “authoritative” texts based on an author’s initial or final intentions, or a fetishization of “copytext,” suited a field in which intentionality could be difficult to determine. The “broken, coded documents” of black literary history might be reread and re-edited from theoretical orientations focused on broader imaginings of textuality, without authorial intention as a guiding principle. An interest in what Gerard Genette termed the “paratext,” including prefaces, typefaces, dust jackets, and eventually what came to be known as the “mate-
rial text,” connected with long-standing concerns in African American studies about the material and institutional contexts of black literature. Similarly, textual scholarship moved toward a greater acceptance of multiplicity in presentations of texts, or what some have termed the “fluid text,” and this plausibly connects with what have been regarded as the especially performative dimensions of black literature, what Jennifer De-Vere Brody identifies as “the issue of the link (or leak) between black ink and embodied forms of blackness—of being black and black being.”

While William L. Andrews would lament in a 1997 essay that “classic African American writers” could not “qualify for complete textual editions in formats comparable to those that are sealing a hallowed place in American literary history for a Harold Frederic or a Charles Brockden Brown,” the fifteen years since have witnessed important editions and anthologies of black literature, several produced by contributors to this collection. At the same time, the growing turn toward digital editions, while often responding brilliantly to the changing circumstances under which texts are and will be archived, edited, and read, also threatens to replay the same tight connections between cost and commercial viability that informed the selection of CEAA editions. The first decade of the twenty-first century has seen important digital editions of William Blake, Dante Gabriel Rossetti, Geoffrey Chaucer, Beowulf, and Willa Cather, among others, but thus far only “smaller” online projects related to African American texts, such as Christopher Mulvey’s edition of Clotel.

Whether this trend will continue remains to be seen, but the financial exigencies of digitizing and storing electronic editions do not figure to change in the foreseeable future. While Yale University Press, for example, in coordination with the Frederick Douglass Papers, has produced important new print editions of Douglass’s autobiographies during this period, the editorial principles adopted there have tended to reinforce the premises upon which author-centered editions have historically proceeded, what Clayborne Carson, in an overview of his editions of Martin Luther King Jr’s papers, has called the “widespread belief among American elites in the notion that Great Men and their ideas alter the course of history.” As Carson acknowledges, the material support for his work on King’s papers itself relies on this ostensibly outmoded historiography, as do Yale’s Douglass editions. Once again, African American literary scholarship finds itself caught between belated inclusion in theoretical approaches to textual scholarship whose foundations are crumbling, on the one hand, and new theoretical visions that turn out to be premised
on familiar practices of exclusion. We present this volume in the hope of finding different ways of conceptualizing this relationship, both in theory and in practice.

The present collection—this instance of *Publishing Blackness*—responds to recent trends in both textual and African Americanist scholarship, with the hopes of relocating this emerging dialogue away from the margins of each field. At the same time, the volume argues that this exchange has long been implicit in each discipline’s concern for modes of textual production and reproduction. Indeed, from the white editorial authentification of slave narratives, to the cultural hybridity evidenced in the Harlem Renaissance’s interaction of Jewish publishers and “New Negro” authors, to the overtly independent publications of the Black Arts Movement, to the immense commercial power of Oprah’s Book Club, African American textuality has consistently revolved around the contests of cultural power inherent in literary production and distribution. Always haunted by the commodification of blackness and by forms of racial surveillance, from the era of slavery to the age of Obama, African American literary production interfaces with the processes of publication and distribution in particularly charged ways. Because the production of racial difference and inequality, as well as the battle against white supremacy that helped produce a black public sphere, has been vitally connected with the rise, and the struggles over control, of American print culture, African Americanist scholarship has the potential to drive textual scholarship in new and provocative directions. As black writers from Hurston to Suzan Lori-Parks and theorists such as Diana Taylor and Fred Moten have pointed out, the mechanisms of publication and archive-building have served racial domination, to such an extent that some black literary expression has attempted to evade traditional Western textual form entirely, embedding itself in slave-thrown pottery in the nineteenth century and in ephemeral material or performative instantiations since.9 Such arguments—which may have relevance for other literary traditions as well (one thinks in particular of Native American and Chicano/a studies)—bring into view the shifting boundaries of textual scholarship’s very self-definition.

Even if not grounded in terms specific to textual scholarship, African Americanist literary scholarship since its inception has evoked theories of textuality and editorial practice. James Weldon Johnson’s 1928 essay “The Dilemma of the Negro Author,” for example, fundamentally concerns the material dissemination of black letters in a white supremacist
society, what Johnson terms “a special problem which the plain American author knows nothing about—the problem of the double audience. . . . The moment a Negro writer takes up his pen or sits down to his typewriter he is immediately called upon to solve, consciously or unconsciously, this problem of the double audience.” Similarly, the trope of the “talking book,” influentially explored by Henry Louis Gates Jr. in The Signifying Monkey and beyond, suggests a sometimes ambivalent yet very productive relationship between print and oral expression in the African American literary tradition. A distrust of the printed word, especially when it concerns or presumes to represent black experience (even if produced by writers of African descent), is written into much black literature after World War II. As Gates asks, “What did/do black people signify in a society in which they were intentionally introduced as the subjugated, as the enslaved cipher? Nothing on the x axis of white signification, and everything on the y axis of blackness.” This version of a double audience, in which a white readership threatens to zero out the paradoxically limited plenitude of a black representational scheme, reframes Johnson’s dilemma in ways that express the particular feedback loop between textual production and reception for African American literature. What has editorial theory or textual scholarship to do with African American literature? Everything.

And vice versa. The mainstream of African American literary study has, arguably, been a wrangling over the relationship of the literary text to its multiple determinations of editorial mediation, packaging, oral antecedent, strategic duplicity, relation to lived experience, ambiguous authorship, canonization, and methods of marketing that affect the material presentation of the text, and thus the text itself. As Houston A. Baker Jr. famously concludes, in a discussion of the Trueblood episode in Invisible Man, “To examine the status of black expressiveness as a commodity, then, is to do more than observe, within the constraints of an institutional theory of art, that the ‘art world’ is a function of economics. In a very real sense, the entire sum of Afro-America’s exchange power has always been coextensive with its stock of expressive resources.”

Publishing Blackness explicitly addresses the issues raised by putting these disciplines in a mutual exchange. The volume charts major issues and trajectories, from decisions concerning the presentation of particular texts to the book-form republication of works previously published in serial form for black-owned periodicals, to issues of archival preservation, to questions of canonization, to the dissemination of texts that
originally had a strong performative dimension, and more recent experiments involving collaborations between black poets and musicians or visual artists. In assembling the essays that follow, we have aimed not to be comprehensive but to present provocations and instigations for further work in this vital area of literary scholarship. We very much agree with Leon Jackson’s recent call “to read both the outsides as well as the insides of texts and theorize the mediatory connections between the two,” and view this collection as another step in a period of slow but steady cross-fertilization between these disciplines over the last several years.

At the same time, this collection takes advantage of its grounding in African American literary history to question the premises and methods of textual scholarship itself. While editorial theory in recent years has emphasized the social dimensions of textual production, this focus has generally not been extended to matters of race (with some notable exceptions). From the problematic and productive hybrid interactions between black writers and white editors and publishers to the constitution of the page itself with black letters on a white background (though with occasional texts that self-consciously foreground, by resisting, this practical norm), there are numerous editorial issues that may change significantly once race is taken into account. In her lecture “Home,” Toni Morrison presents an example of one such difference in her discussion of Beloved’s last sentence, “Certainly no clamor for a kiss.” As Morrison explains, her editor at Alfred A. Knopf, Robert Gottlieb, “had suggested an alteration in the language of the sentence,” leading Morrison eventually to revise her original version with the closing word “kiss,” and prompting outrage in a friend of Morrison’s who had seen the novel’s manuscript. Morrison concludes, “Actually, I think my editor was right. The original word was the ‘wrong’ word. But I also know that my friend was right: the ‘wrong’ word, in this case, was also the only word. Since language is community, if the cognitive ecology of a language is altered, so is the community.”

The social and racialized dimensions of language, and the commercial and cultural dimensions of Morrison’s response to her editor’s suggestion, generate precisely the kinds of questions that the essays in this volume address: how to understand relationships between texts and communities of readers, and how to chart the material production of those texts and the implicit construction of their readerly communities.

African Americanist criticism has always involved textual scholarship, whether that moniker has been used or not. Textual scholarship’s primary relationship to African American studies derives from its focus
on historicizing the processes of textual production, which grounds in material and social detail the ways in which authorial and publishing processes reflect and/or struggle against the social, cultural, and political systems working in the background of a work’s production. While most African Americanist research has focused at this level of analysis, the reproduction of African American literature has tended to take the texts’ material history lightly, as the imperative of simply getting out-of-print texts back into circulation—specifically as African American literature—has been the priority. This in itself indexes the force of the color line in the production and reproduction of work by African American authors. And yet questions about how books are edited, published, marketed, distributed, repackaged, and anthologized have been raised from very early in the history of African American literature. They are ultimately questions about how books function as evidence for the ways in which “race” has operated as a social category. The editorial theorist Paul Eggert concludes of the broader relationship between editorial scholarship and the social sphere: “But of course, until the bibliographic work is done, the fine-grained ways in which a literary text can be shown to duplicate or resist or reformulate the ideological cross-currents of its period are not reliably available for close inspection, although ungrounded generalisations may always be entertained.” In the case of African American literature, such bibliographic work might entail examining a book’s various covers and other paratextual features; comparing its manuscript and published versions in relation to the choices mandated by editors, publishers, or other agents; investigating the advertised images of authors and their books; charting a work’s popularized format, in paperback editions or in anthologies; and many other avenues.

Spurred by Jerome McGann’s work in 1980s and 1990s—especially in *A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism* (1983), *The Textual Condition* (1991), and *Black Riders* (1993)—editorial theorists shifted toward a socialized conception of authorship, relocating authors within a broader spectrum of participants in the process of textual production, alongside editors, publishers, printers, and various other associated agents. Editorial work thus became not a pursuit of an “ideal” or “definitive” edition that would reflect an author’s original or final intentions, but rather a matter of reproducing a work’s first published edition, as a window into the social contexts behind the process of making the work public. The choice between an intentionalist or materialist editorial orientation is more, or at least differently, complicated in the case of many black writ-
ers, given the actual and/or perceived circumscriptions on their agency, both at the immediate level of composition and revision and in the wider sphere of aesthetic expressiveness.

While the story of the McGannian revolution in editorial theory will be familiar to those readers approaching this collection from that vantage point, it is worth rehearsing briefly for those encountering the essays here from a background in African American studies. (Like all such narratives, this one necessarily reduces and simplifies a complex history; readers interested in more detailed accounts should consult the Select Bibliography at the end of this volume.) The “modern textual criticism” that McGann began to critique in the early 1980s, frustrated by his experiences editing Byron, was grounded in earlier twentieth-century work from W. W. Greg, Fredson Bowers, and G. Thomas Tanselle. This editorial school defines its choice of copy-text, and thus its guiding sense of textuality, in terms of final authorial intention, often using such intention as a regulative ideal, in the absence of direct evidence of an author's wishes, but still premised on what an editor perceives the author's intentions to have been. As Tanselle concludes in his key 1976 essay, “The Editorial Problem of Final Authorial Intentions,” an editor is “pledged to print only the author's words.” Even in cases where an editor's judgment leads to a different text than the one ordinarily perceived as “final,” the “justification is that the reading is 'final' in terms of his [the editor's] view of the work as an organic whole.”16 For editorial theorists, the controversy surrounding Hans Walter Gabler’s 1984 “synoptic” edition of *Ulysses* revolved around the lack of any single document or set of documents Joyce had “authorized”; rather, Gabler determines what he perceives Joyce’s intentions to have been in an ideal world (which of course was far from the case in the actual circumstances of production). Gabler’s *Ulysses* is therefore, for McGann, the first instance of postmodern editing.17

McGann’s critique of the Greg-Bowers-Tanselle orientation first finds statements such as Tanselle’s above to be internally incoherent, and, more important, privileges a work’s first publication as most expressive of the history of its production, rather than seeking a return to a version desired by an author but interfered with on the way to the public. For McGann, Jack Stillinger, and others, authorship becomes an inherently social process, as reflected by the messy realities of publication, and so their approaches to editing derive from this materialist stance. Rather than restoring Hurston’s *Dust Tracks on a Road* to its manuscript version,
for example, before the cuts and revisions mandated by Lippincott in the midst of World War II, a McGannian editor would prioritize the book’s initial publication, finding in the frustration of Hurston’s intentions rich evidence for the social circumscriptions of black authorship in the 1940s.

The last several years, however, have witnessed something of a post-McGannian shift within editorial theory, toward a more comprehensive sense of textuality as always oscillating between intentionalist and materialist instantiations. In such works as Peter Shillingsburg’s *Resisting Texts* (1997), Paul Bryant’s *The Fluid Text* (2002), Sally Bushell’s *Text as Process* (2009), and Paul Eggert’s *Securing the Past* (2009), there emerges a growing preference for privileging the work as a collection of versions, and thus for editing multiple iterations, rather than focusing primarily on a particular text emanating from an author’s ideal or a publisher’s product. As Bryant explains, “The very nature of writing, the creative process, and shifting intentionality, as well as the powerful social forces that occasion translation, adaptation, and censorship among readers—in short, the facts of revision, publication, and reception—urge us to recognize that the only ‘definitive text’ is a multiplicity of texts, or rather, the fluid text.” This kind of editorial approach seems especially well suited for much African American literature, whether it is aimed at multiple audiences as part of the struggle to resist being framed as “only” black while also carving out a distinct aesthetic space from which an authentically black cultural perspective could develop, or is aimed deliberately at a black audience with an emphasis on process and performance as well as communal collaboration rather than textual fixity and reproducibility. The former tensions are clearly in play in the career of Jean Toomer, for instance, who published much of the poetry and fiction that would make up *Cane* in a variety of modernist journals, several of which (such as *Double Dealer* or *S4N*) were not marked as distinctly “Negro,” and who yearned to be known, in reviews and advertisements for his work, simply as “American.” The latter tensions are endemic in the Black Arts Movement, as James Smethurst and Margo Natalie Crawford point out in this book.

Similarly, the problem of how to edit the first British and three later American editions of William Wells Brown’s *Clotel* (or *Clotelle*, or *Miralda*, as it was alternately titled) derives in part from Brown’s flight to London following the passage of the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, just as Lippincott’s removal of “whole chunks” of Hurston’s *Dust Tracks* appears alternately to contemporary critics as either Hurston allowing her edi-
tor to eliminate any “overt statements . . . that might have been viewed as inflammatory,” or as Hurston enacting a “duping” strategy in which the revised passages subvert their intended editorial meanings. Editors selecting one of these editions as a copy text, or determining the relationship between a main text and its annotated variants, will require a nuanced sense of American racial history in order to parse out either authorial intention or the social circumstances surrounding initial publication, just as African Americanists interpreting such works should realize the editorial choices (or lack thereof) informing the contemporary reprints on which they base their readings.

The historical difficulties of residing outside of a rigid black/white system, or the kinds of imaginary classificatory structures that both make cultural practices like passing possible even while the principles upon which they ostensibly rest are undercut by the possibility of passing: these are the senses of history that have largely defined African Americanist studies, and with which textual scholarship would profitably engage. In his recent *What Was African American Literature?* (2011), Kenneth W. Warren analyzes the overlay of history and contemporary perspective in terms of repeated and “oversimplified” emphases on racism.

Rather, what needs getting at is what follows when the problem of racism has become a problem of history. For once racism is described as a problem of how we understand and acknowledge the power of history, “color blindness” becomes something other than pretending not to notice conventional marks of racial difference even as one makes important decisions based on that difference. Rather, “color blindness” turns out to be a kind of blindness to the presentness of the past, a refusal to see that people can still be victimized by the past, and that the past can be victimized by the present.

Whether or not one ultimately agrees with Warren’s provocative thesis—that the gradual disintegration of Jim Crow society will consequently mean the end of an African American literature that has defined itself in relation to the creation of racial equality—Warren’s argument highlights the simultaneously productive and problematic relationship between black aesthetics and black politics, and the vision of history that derives from that intersection. The essays in this volume are similarly situated,
for editing—both in theory and in practice—turns inevitably on the “presentness of the past,” by asking how to represent a work’s historical processes and versions to present (and future) readers.

This collection ended up with a notable emphasis on anthologization, which was not the editors’ initial intention, yet this emphasis is symptomatic of the structurally central role of anthologies in the rise and shifting definitions of “black literature,” closely connected with social and political goals. Bringing attention to black literature as such, and developing an audience for literature by African Americans and others of African descent, entailed collecting different varieties of it and presenting it in aggregate form, in the process willy-nilly developing a “canon” of black literature distinct from other literatures, even in the case of anthologies, such as Countee Cullen’s *Caroling Dusk*, that did not believe in such a concept as “Negro poetry.” In the course of the twentieth century the notion of African American literature as a coherent category decisively won out, most decisively in fact after the time when, according to Warren’s argument, “African American literature” ended—that is, after the passage of civil rights legislation that spelled the end of formal segregation. The legal supports of racial segregation fell before an assault that was both “integrationist” and nationalist to varying degrees, self-consciously defined as the movement of *a people* with a long history, and with a future. “I may not get there with you,” Dr. King famously said, “but we as a people will get to the promised land.” Thus a form of what Darby English, in the context of African American visual art, has termed “black representational space” became institutionalized—along with black studies itself—as never before just as certain forms of legally sanctioned segregation died. As Ivy Wilson points out in this book, the archival turn and emergence of such series as the Oxford Collected Black Writing Series edited by Henry Louis Gates Jr. may signal “a certain state in the institutionalization of African American Studies that no longer requires an immediate political concern or social movement to authorize its lines of critical inquiry.” This insight might be of considerable theoretical significance to an understanding of the history of textual scholarship as a whole.

The archival turn to which Wilson alludes (which would be impossible without antecedents in the field of collecting and library science—Arthur Schomburg’s collection acquired by the New York Public Library in the 1920s, the acquisition of the Moorland and Spingarn collections at Howard University, the development of the James Weldon Johnson
Memorial Collection in the late 1930s and 1940s, and other such endeavors) has been an enormously productive development as well as one that required some attempt at the definition of boundaries, and it followed upon African Americanist criticism from the Black Arts Movement forward (by Larry Neal, Stephen E. Henderson, Addison Gayle Jr., Baker, Gates, and many others) that was largely defined by the goal of distinguishing what made “black literature” black, not just sociologically but formally, ethically, and thematically. Examining the changing notions of what challenged editors of black literature anthologies and book series over the course of the twentieth century therefore, it would seem, ends up being a major issue for an investigation of the “textual production of race” suggested in this book’s subtitle.

Also significant as one examines anthologies and reprint series or new editions is the oblique relationship between nationality and race. While the category “black” challenges national boundaries, the converse is also true: an author who is “black” or “Negro” in one country may not be so considered in another, as Langston Hughes sadly discovered on his first trip to Africa when people of present-day Ghana whom he encountered told him he was a white man. This did not, of course, prevent Hughes from continuing to identify with Africans as Negro, or black—a choice, however involuntary in the American context, without which the canon of African American poetry might look much different than it does today. If Caribbean writers like Claude McKay, Eric Walrond, and Paule Marshall have entered the canon of African American literature, destabilizing the enclosure of “African American” as a subcategory of “American” literature, so has the attempt to internationalize American understandings of blackness destabilized that very category, most notably in the midcentury anthology none other than Hughes coedited with his close friend Arna Bontemps, discussed by Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo in this book. One might notice intriguing tensions as well as connections that surface between the various chapters of this book as symptomatic of tensions, ambiguities, and ambivalences about the very notion of “black literature” in the history of the concept’s twentieth-century career, and its currently debated status among scholars, poets, novelists, and playwrights.

The nine essays that follow are organized both chronologically and thematically, with the guiding questions outlined above appearing across a range of periods and genres. Ivy G. Wilson focuses on antebellum print culture in relation to Thomas Hamilton’s Anglo-African Magazine, which
he conceived of as a space in which African Americans could “speak for themselves.” Turning from the fraught process of production for black-owned periodicals in this period to three of the magazine’s most prominent contributors—Martin R. Delany, Frances E. W. Harper, and James McCune Smith—Wilson seeks to contextualize these authors within the discursive field of Hamilton’s magazine, thus recentering contemporary recoveries of nineteenth-century African American literature away from writers considered in relative isolation, in order to better gauge the “multitudinous and sometimes contradictory ideas of these writers at specific moments.” George Hutchinson’s essay begins with an invocation of recent “Post-Black” (which is not to say postrace) artists’ resistance to enclosure in “black representational space” and then examines curiously related efforts of New Negro authors to evade racial enclosure. Subsequent historical and editorial approaches to the Harlem Renaissance, he argues, tend to reinscribe a majority/minority distinction that they resisted, that seemed to them related to a Jim Crow ordering of the literary field. In the first of several analyses of anthologization, Hutchinson considers Countee Cullen as a case study, before turning to “the paratextual elements and bibliographic codes that help shape a text’s reception,” here attuned to Cullen once more and to Nella Larsen’s *Passing*. Essays by John Young and George Bornstein orient themselves toward author-publisher interactions between the 1920s and 1940s, with Young examining the ethical implications of Richard Wright’s revisions to *Native Son* and *Black Boy* (*American Hunger*), both made at the behest of his Harper Bros. editor and the Book-of-the-Month Club. Bornstein considers several exemplary works of the New Negro Renaissance within the field of their publishers’ avant-garde lists, which typically included works by Irish and Jewish authors as well, thus creating a kind of countermodernism to that produced by more established (and Anglo-Saxon) American houses.

Ifeoma Kiddoe Nwankwo investigates the politics of anthologizing in the case of Langston Hughes and Arna Bontemps’s 1949 *Poetry of the Negro*, situating that unique anthology in relation to earlier models. Nwankwo’s reading of the Hughes and Bontemps first edition raises the question of what constitutes “Negro” poetry: is the racial identification of the author the constitutive factor, or is the textual subject rather the primary consideration? Noting the slippage in *The Poetry of the Negro* between poetry “by” Negroes and poetry “of” Negroes coming from what are euphemistically termed “tributaries” (meaning white Ameri-
and then, even more dramatically, the conceptual complications that ensue from the inclusion of poetry by Caribbean poets of any racial designation and on any subject (the Caribbean being a “Negro” space by implicit definition), Nwankwo positions this midcentury anthology against contemporary interests in Black Atlantic, diasporic, and transnational blackness. Notably, in a later edition of the anthology, Arna Bontemps deleted the entire Caribbean section. It seems that what counts, textually, as black has never been certain.

Hughes also appears in William J. Maxwell’s contribution, but here as the subject of the FBI’s decades-long surveillance of African American authors, in what Maxwell terms the Bureau’s “shaping entanglement with Afro-modernist writing.” In more than a few cases, black authors wrote with the awareness of an interpretive community of G-men bent on making cases. This shadow presence within the literature of the Negro Renaissance, the longer New Negro movement, and after has importantly defined the FBI’s cultural presence; and the effects of “editorial federalism” on black writers from composition and revision through publication and beyond opens new possibilities for further research into the production of African American literature through much of the twentieth century.

Gene Jarrett and James Smethurst in the next two essays reflect on their own editorial choices with respect to anthologies currently under way. After analyzing the ideologies implicit in earlier anthologies, in which the rationale for anthologization is to “represent the race,” thus screening out what he has elsewhere termed “anomalous texts,” particularly those without black characters, Jarrett positions his own *Alternative Reader* of African American literature (2006) and his in-progress *Blackwell Anthology of African American Literature* in terms of contemporary readers (both mainstream and academic) who may be “awaiting their own disarticulation from the straightjacket of racial authenticity and representation in African American political history.” Can the category African American Literature, he implicitly asks, include texts that do not represent African Americans except in terms of the one-drop rule as applied to the authors of such texts? What constitutes a black text?

The volume’s concluding essays, by Smethurst and Margo Natalie Crawford, turn to the presentness of the recent past, investigating the material forms in which Black Arts texts reached their publics. Smethurst faces the challenge of how to represent those forms in composing (with his collaborators Sonia Sanchez and John Bracey) a Black Arts anthol-
ogy. Observing a privileging of “process over product” in many Black Arts works, he asks how one might produce an edition of such contingent textual forms without endowing them with a false historical stability. Based on a “performance ethos in which artist, work, and audience are intimately bound” in the common question of “what made a text ‘Black,’” Black Arts texts in Smethurst’s account compel an approach to anthologizing that is ultimately focused on classroom use, growing out of the necessity all teachers of the movement have faced in assembling their own quasi-anthologies to represent this period.

In a more intensive analysis of Black Arts Movement challenges to Western textual practices, Crawford scans a range of efforts to produce a “Black Book” in the course of the twentieth century, coming to focus on close readings of the paratexts of Black Arts pamphlets and magazines and the inimitable text/image production by Amiri Baraka and Fundi Abernathy, *In Our Terribleness*, the title page for which was a mirror with the title printed on it. Crawford demonstrates the oppositional status of such works as textual objects: Black Arts material texts, she concludes, “were the textual performance of the antitext, the performance of writing and producing books that would be too action-oriented to be held as a precious object of highbrow capital.” In her coda, Crawford adds, appropriately for our own purposes in introducing the book you are now holding, “The Black Arts impulse to make art that defied the dominant norms was tied to the impulse to make art that was too excessive to be contained in books.”

Far from the last word on this field, this collection will, we hope, stimulate further investigations, archival research, classroom questions, and perhaps even new forms of anthologies, as these two rich and diverse disciplines continue to engage each other. Many topics and problems fall outside the scope of the essays here, including (but certainly not limited to) interactions between African American literature and texts produced by other “minority” authors, from the early days of the republic to the present; the efficacy of more historically grounded editorial approaches to past black literary works, versus the kinds of fluid textuality made possible by advances in the digital humanities; the packaging and distribution of mass-market African American writers, from Iceberg Slim to Zane; or the material forms of black cinema. As early twenty-first-century humanities scholarship continues the project of “laying equal claim to the Fourth of July,” in the philosopher Charles W. Mills’s
words, the material forms of American racial history should continue to be revisited and reproduced, even as the means of those returns are reconceived from both sides of the dialogue between textual and African Americanist scholarship.\textsuperscript{21}

Notes


3. As early as 1983, in \textit{A Critique of Modern Textual Criticism} (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), Jerome J. McGann would note the “nonscriptural level of authority” in \textit{The Autobiography of Malcolm X}, observing, “An editor who came to deal with this work might be tempted to say, simply, that Alex Haley is the principal authority for the ‘words’ while Malcolm X is the authority for the material and ‘ideas.’ Needless to say, it does not require much imagination to realize the problems which would await an approach based upon such distinctions” (85, 85–86). On the other hand, this is the only African American text to appear as an example in \textit{Critique} (aside from a passing reference to Eldridge Cleaver’s \textit{Soul on Ice} in the same paragraph) and is bracketed by discussions of Bulwer-Lytton, John Ashbery, Marianne Moore, and Auden. Even D. C. Greetham’s 1999 study, \textit{Theories of the Text} (Oxford University Press), so exhaustive in its exemplary detail that the name index stretches across twenty pages, includes nary a mention of Frederick Douglass, Zora Neale Hurston, Ralph Ellison, or any other African American literary example.


9. Michael A. Chaney discusses the pottery of David Drake (“Dave the Potter”) in \textit{Fugitive Vision: Slave Image and Black Identity in Antebellum Narrative} (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2009), 176–208. On a theorization of the relationship of performativity as improvisation to black aesthetics and language, see Fred Moten, \textit{In the
Break: The Aesthetics of the Black Radical Tradition (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). In The Archive and the Repertoire: Performing Cultural Memory in the Americas (Durham: Duke University Press, 2003), Diana Taylor argues for “embodied memory” in performance as offering alternative perspectives on historical experience in the Americas compared to, or in concert with, those derived from the written archive, especially for those shut out from positions of power.


