Mutha' Is Half A Word

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Preface

1. June Jordan’s voice from “A Couple of Words on Behalf of Sex (Itself)” influences the title of this preface and the following introduction.

Introduction

1. I am referring to Barbara Omolade’s assessment, “The black man moved toward the black woman, clothing her raped and abused black body with the mantle of respectable womanhood, giving protection, and claiming ownership of her” (258).

2. On p. 48, bell hooks reminds us that a figure who breaks the rules but has no conscious politics and does not connect it to the struggle to be self-defining focuses simply on the journey and not on the self that is being invented. In the end, such a reactionary act eliminates the possibility of plural identities for another fixed space.

3. Dorothy Roberts’s *Killing the Black Body* alters discussions of reproduction and race, while Cathy Cohen’s *The Boundaries of Blackness* explores how limited Black political ideologies and movements have been in regard to issues of sexual health. Angela Davis has taken on the prison-industrial complex movement, paying attention to gender within her own discussion.

4. These entertainers of the highly sexualized disco era have repudiated their previous bad-girl performances as sinful and harmful and never learned the lesson of ranking axiologically opposed binaries.

5. Hammonds discusses both of these historical accounts. Deborah Gray White’s *Too Heavy A Load: Black Women in Defense of Themselves 1894–1994* argues that “black women persistently spoke on their own behalf on issues of race leadership, negative stereotypes, woman’s suffrage and women’s rights, and civil rights and civil liberties” (16). As Darlene Clark Hine noted of White’s examination, those Black women were inevitably involved with a feminism rooted in the “noble” cause to “defend their name and to ‘uplift the race’” (review). Not to undermine or make light of the 1890s club organizations of Black women, 1920s National Association of Colored Women, or the history of other Black women’s organizations from the mid-twentieth century to the present, but such defensive posturing has typically led to the quieting of non-middle-class and non-heteronorma-
tive/nonheterosexual women that Black female critics like Hammonds have frequently
discussed. Were all Black women silent? What about women uninvolved in those organiza-
tions or not associated with a specific middle-class contingency? Were there no instances
of culture where Black women, heterosexual and queer, were not silent?

6. In *A Voice from the South: By a Black Woman of the South*, Anna Julia Cooper joins
the ranks of W. E. B. Du Bois and Martin Delaney in their assessments of Black woman-
hood at the beginning of the twentieth century. Cooper’s popular phrase about Black
women’s social and political entry comes from the following passage: “Only the black
woman can say ‘where and when I enter, in the quiet undisputed dignity of my woman-
hood, without violence and without suing or special patronage, then and there the whole
Negro race enters with me’” (31). And so the protection of Black womanhood is further
incorporated into agendas of Black nationalism.

7. In addition to DuCille, there have been a number of critics who have addressed
the limited and essentialist use of vernacular criticism. See Hazel Carby’s “Ideologies of the
Black Folk: The Historical Novel of Slavery,” Diana Fuss’s *Essentially Speaking: Feminism,
Nature, and Difference*, and Robin D. G. Kelley’s “Notes on Deconstructing the Folk.”

8. Other writers who have expressed similar sentiments are Devon Carbardo, Cathy
Cohen, Dwight McBride, bell hooks, Essex Hemphill, and Barbara Smith.

9. In *Yearning*, hooks speaks of postmodern blackness as a politic of difference that
would “incorporate the voices of displaced, marginalized, exploited, and oppressed black
people” but that would also “break with the notion of ‘authority’ as ‘mastery over’” as
simply a rhetorical device (25).

10. Jonathan Culler’s *On Deconstruction: Theory and Criticism after Structuralism*
reveals the importance of difference: “The term différence, which Derrida introduces
alludes to this undecidable, non-synthetic alteration between the perspectives of struc-
ture and event. The verb differer means to differ and defer. Différence sounds the same as
difference, but the ending -ance, which is used to produce verbal nouns, makes it a new
form meaning ‘difference-differing-deferring.’ Différance thus designates both a ‘passive’
difference already in place as the condition of signification and an act of differeing which
produces differences” (97).


12. The initial inquiry into the difference between the two is discussed in Samuel

13. I refer back to Anna Julia Cooper’s *A Voice from the South*.

14. See Susan T. Hollis and Linda Pershings’s *Feminist Theory and the Study of Folklore*
for general discussions of gender in folklore. Essays from the collection expose issues of
genre and gender as well as nation and gender.

notes, “We can extend to the system of the signs in general what Saussure says about
language: The linguistic system (langue) is necessary for speech events (parole) to be intelli-
gible and produce their effects, but the latter are necessary for the system to establish itself”
(39–40). Likewise, Derrida shows that signifiers do not produce signified, they produce
more signifiers. As a less oral culture, writing becomes privileged in the West. The concep-
tual order of written over orality is created primarily because of the binary oppositions we
have imposed on language, and rather than creating true meaning we create signifiers that
must rely on each other to even obtain meaning. Gates’s theory of signifyin(g) attempts to
reverse this order.

16. Roberts connects the animal tales of Br’er Rabbit to the tales of John and Old
Master, John (a slave driver), human possessing all the traits of Br'er Rabbit, but his trickery is more sophisticated and complex. Br'er Rabbit leads to the establishment of a heroic tradition in America.

17. See Roger Abrahams’s *Deep Down in the Jungle: Negro Narrative Folklore in the Streets of Philadelphia*, Harold Courlander’s *Negro Folk Song U.S.A.*, and Joel Chandler Harris’s *Uncle Remus: His Songs and Sayings*.

18. Years later, Kimberlee Crenshaw’s “Whose Story Is It Anyway? Feminist and Antiracist Appropriations of Anita Hill” examines the narrow view of Black women’s sexuality. She notes that within feminist contexts rape and the rape trial serve as the dominant tropes of as a central site of the oppression of women. She then argues that lynching narrative is the trope of antiracist discourse (405). In both discourses, the Black body’s desires remain absent and without expression.

19. Ifi Amadiume’s *Re-Inventing Africa: Matriarchy, Religion, & Culture* and Nkiru Nzegwu’s “Cultural Epistemologies of Motherhood: Refining the Concept of Mother” really expose the flaws of the way the West’s version of motherhood limits concepts about women and mothering in general, but African women in particular. Both works find a way to disconnect motherhood from Western concepts of womanhood in ways that delimit gender.

20. Harris’s valuable contributions to the connection between Black female literature and folklore are exhibited in her critical works: *Fiction and Folklore: The Novels of Toni Morrison* and *The Power of the Porch: The Storyteller’s Craft in Zora Neale Hurston, Gloria Naylor, and Randall Kenan*.

21. See Carby’s “It Jus Be’s Dat Way Sometimes: The Sexual Politics of Women’s Blues.”

22. Though this text does not examine mothering and motherhood, critics such as Sheri Parks, Yvonne Atkinson, and Marlo David have already started much-needed and serious critical conversations about the representations of mothering and motherhood, gender, and sexuality in African American women’s popular culture.

23. According to linguist Geneva Smitherman’s book *Black Talk*, muthafucka very rarely refers to someone having sex with one’s mother, and in the case of tradition Black mothers having consensual sex seems not worthy of discussion.

24. Though they don’t engage issues of sexuality strictly in terms of desire, recent scholarship of motherhood and reproduction is amazing and wonderfully educational. I am specifically enamored with Michele Mitchell’s *Righteous Propagation: African Americans and the Politics of Racial Destiny after Reconstruction* and Jennifer L. Morgan’s *Laboring Women: Reproduction and Gender in New World Slavery* for their dissections of the way Black women’s sexuality, during slavery and shortly after emancipation, has been used for the developing United States and the Black nation within the United States.

25. See Carl Jung’s *The Archetypes of and the Collective Unconscious* for his well-known discussion of trickster as the id of a community.

26. She speaks solely of desire and not trickster. I invoke her words here and elsewhere as a way to show trickster as a non-Western metaphor for desire.

Chapter 1

1. Ideas about the matrilocal structure of Black families can be found in texts concerned with the predicament of Black women in slavery. See Paula Giddings’s *When and Where I Enter: The Impact of Black Women on Race and Sex in America*, Eugene D.

2. I am now borrowing from Spillers and taking her model to the necessary extreme in examining Janey’s naming.

3. Spillers explains that such captive bodies focus “a private and particular space, at which point of convergence biological, sexual, social, cultural, linguistic, ritualistic, and psychological forces join. This profound intimacy of interlocking detail is disrupted, however, by externally imposed meanings and uses” (259–60).

4. For example, early Black nationalists adopted the use of African for slaves and ex-slaves, but when the Colonization Society began a movement to take Blacks back to Africa, a growing number of Black people avoided the term (Stuckey 202). Likewise, African and Colored were discontinued as some Black nationalists sought to avoid calling attention to the difference of race as Blacks sought to integrate into American society (207). Unnaming, then, engaged the ideological and institutional means by which Black people might accomplish complete liberation in the United States. (208).

5. Even the gender-neutral *alaafin* (Yorùbá word for ruler) becomes mistranslated into king or queen and ranked accordingly in Western order.

6. The very way in which Black men argued for the right to vote in terms of a masculine right at the end of the nineteenth century, and the way Black nationalism positioned Black masculinity in the fight for civil rights has already proven that dominant Black male communities prefer gender naming to gender unnaming so that they might access power through patrilineal lines.

7. Harold Courlander’s *A Treasury of Afro-American Folklore* describes the number of songs and legends about John Henry as epic. Levine calls this figure the slave trickster (389), and John Roberts claims it as the John and Old Maser Trickster Cycle (44).

8. Michelle Cliff’s wonderful novel *Free Enterprise* makes use of both versions of Annie Christmas. She writes a narrative about female abolitionists buoyed by the water.

9. I borrow this term from the introduction of Oyêwùmí’s *The Invention of Woman*.

10. There are several works that demonstrate such a belief. I have already acknowledged Stepto’s *From behind the Veil* and Gates’s *The Signifying Monkey*. Other texts contain the same thematic focus: Houston Baker’s *Blues, Ideology, and Afro-American Literature*, Gates’s critical introduction to *The Slave Narrative* and *Figures in Black* (xxii), William Andrews’s *To Tell a Free Story: The First Century of African American Autobiography, 1760–1865*, Houston Baker’s *The Journey Back: Issues in Black Literature and Criticism*, and Valerie Smith’s *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*. Ronald Judy argues that the theory of the slave narrative as a product committed to Enlightenment and Kantian ideas of being and humanism is debatable, and he presents Bontemps’s foreword from *The Slave Narrative* (xx) as a pro-Kant view of being and the slave narrative.

11. In the foreword to *(Dis)forming the American Canon*, Wahneema Lubiano previews a specific problem with Judy’s text as it concerns gender (xxii).

12. See also Judy’s discussion of Kant: “Kant’s problem is how to think about the Negro, not as a phenomenal appearance, or undetermined object of empirical intuition, but as an intellectual concept, a derivative of the concept of ‘Man’” (**(Dis)forming the American Canon* 110–15)). It is in this particular discussion that Lubiano feels Judy could have also considered the critique of gender itself as it relates to race or the Negro.
13. Robert Stepto’s *From behind the Veil* and Gates’s *The Signifying Monkey*.

14. “Sign” in the *Encyclopedia of Contemporary Literary Theory* also notes that “a sign implies not only a system, however simple, within which a sign can signify, but also a sender and receiver” (623).

15. Muñoz discusses the process of disidentification as one that “scrambles and reconstructs the encoded message of a cultural text in a fashion that both exposes the encoded message’s universalizing and exclusionary machinations and recircuits its workings to account for, include, and empower minority identities and identification” (31).

16. See Denise Riley’s *Am I That Name: Feminism and the Category of “Women” in History* (158–60) and Constance Penley’s *The Future of an Illusion: Film, Feminism, and Psychoanalysis* (179). Riley’s work attempts to understand Truth’s subjectivity by signifying on Truth’s famous statement, changing “Ain’t I a Woman” to “Ain’t I a Fluctuating Identity” (1). Penley asserts that Truth’s statement acts as “two ideas or strategies . . . important to feminism . . . ‘epistemological’ and ‘metaphysical;’ the other—represented by Truth—is ‘political’” (179). Deborah McDowell’s *The Changing Same: Black Women’s Literature, Criticism, and Theory* provides prudent criticism of these two critiques of Truth’s importance:

Riley’s move to appropriate Sojourner Truth introduces a subtle racial marker that distinguishes between Truth’s original words and Riley’s displacement. . . . That Truth’s declarative question . . . might be read as political and epistemological simultaneously seems not to have occurred to Penley, partly because she manipulates both these categories . . . to conform to an already polarized and preconceived understanding. (159)

17. Accounts on the Crafts’ speech published in the *Liberator* suggest that William becomes the primary speaker on the lecture circuit with Ellen speaking as directed, all as a protective measure to ensure Ellen’s status as a virtuous woman.

18. William narrates the dilemma:

On reaching my wife’s cottage she handed me her pass, and I showed mine, but at that time neither of us were able to read them. It is not only unlawful for slaves to be taught to read, but in some of the States there are heavy penalties attached, such as fines and imprisonment, which will be vigorously enforced upon any one who is humane enough to violate the so-called law. . . . So, while sitting in our little room upon the verge of despair, all at once my wife raised her head, and with a smile upon her face, which was a moment before bathed in tears, said, “I think I have it!” I asked what it was. She said, “I think I can make a poultice and bind up my right hand in a sling, and with propriety ask the officers to register my name for me.” I thought that would do. (34)

19. There is a sustained discussion of the moral implications of Ellen’s passing in the text (30, 35).

20. One tale, “All God’s Chillen Had Wings,” suggests that “once all Africans could fly like birds; but owing to their many transgressions, their wings were taken away” (Hughes and Bontemps 62).

21. Valerie Smith’s work and her theory of garreting support thinking of Black female subjectivity as trickster-like. When Smith discusses the way garreting allows Jacobs to move in and out of the discourses of domesticity in her American Studies Association presentation “Loopholes of Retreat,” later thematically revisited in her introduction to *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl* by Harriet Jacobs and her critical work *Self-Discovery and Authority in Afro-American Narrative*, Smith uncovers another method of trickster-troping enacted by Jacobs.
to unname. Samira Kawash elucidates further on Jacobs’s use of the garret in her argument about the garret and loopholes of retreat in Dislocating the Color Line: Identity, Hybridity, and Singularity in African American Narrative. See also Jean Fagan Yellin’s Introduction to another edition of Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl: Written by Herself by Harriet A. Jacobs.

22. See the introduction to Charles H. Davis and Henry L. Gates Jr., eds., The Slave’s Narratives.

23. Robert Stepto’s From behind the Veil claims that the two pregeneric myths of African American literary tradition are freedom and literacy. However, that theory rarely takes into account differences based on gender, class, or caste status on the plantation.

24. See Gates’s The Signifying Monkey.

25. Bruce Mills’s “Lydia Maria Child and the Endings to Harriet Jacobs’ Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl” offers an opposing view of the conclusion of Jacobs’s narrative. He turns to the influence of Lydia Maria Child as Jacobs’s editor and argues that Jacobs’s original ending included John Brown’s raid. He suggests that Child encouraged Jacobs to change it to include a statement on marriage and freedom and potential joys of such domesticity as a way to calm rather than agitate her readers (257). Mills argument supports my reading of Jacobs’s need to trickster-trope throughout the text. However, I further assert that even if Jacobs submits the alternative conclusion of marriage as a substitute for her more radical commentary on John Brown’s raid, she continues trickster-troping to unname gender and sexuality by exposing marriage as practiced in her time as a lesser version of slavery for women.

26. In “Ties That (Un)bind: Feminism, Sisterhood and Other Foreign Relations,” Oyèrónké Oyêwùmí dismisses Lorde’s trickster-troping for the way it and U.S. Black female critics appropriate African culture to explore non-Western configurations of gender and sexuality for their construction of a Black lesbian nation. Though her commentary on appropriations is very valid, the direction of her assessment makes one wonder what the cause of dismissal would be had it been an African lesbian critic who had done the same thing. Or as critic Greg Thomas has noted of Oyêwùmí’s critique on the invention of woman in the West: Can a critic who so easily and thoroughly dismantles the Western concepts of gender hierarchy in her own work really expect that limited concepts of sexuality would also remain intact?

27. Though she does not speak of trickster, Mae G. Henderson’s canonical work, “Speaking in Tongues: Dialogics, Dialectics, and the Black Woman Writer’s Literary Tradition” exposes how, even without a Mawu to give them seven languages, Black women writers possess a tradition in regard to subjectivity and language that rivals Fa.

28. See Oyêwùmí’s discussion of aurality and orality in The Invention of Women. In further explicating on the mistranslation of gender by Western culture, she explores the weight given to the visual over the oral (30).

Chapter 2

1. The biomythography does not provide a final ending. However, Lorde’s own life offers a valiant example of the power of the erotic and trickster’s imprint. Alexis DeVeaux’s biography of Lorde attempts to fill in gaps not covered in Zami.

2. See Trudier Harris’s “From Exile to Asylum: Religion to Community in the Writings of Contemporary Black Women” and “This Disease Called Strength: Some Observations of the Compensating Construction of Black Female Characters,” Gay Wilentz’s Healing
Narratives: Women Writers Curing Cultural Dis-ease, and Valerie Lee's Granny Midwives & Black Women Writers. Each work documents, through historical analysis of critical analysis of the literary character of the healer, society's ideas about black women as healers, the known characteristics attributed to black women healers who are either exiled or outcasts from their communities, asexual and nonthreatening women, and all explore the healer's effect on those coming to be healed or being healed.


4. Herskovits's Dahomean Narrative provides great details about how the Fon view Fa as the writing Mawu uses to create each person. This is why Gates's project with poststructuralism connects so easily to trickster (207–208).

5. In Corregidora, Ursa Corregidora is a blues singer who gives witness through her singing gift. Her witnessing/blues singing acts as a communal way of healing African Americans. Her mythical legacy is “the important thing is making generations. They can burn the papers but they can't burn consciousness” (14). The repetitive and recursiveness of this phrase in the text makes the statement mythical in the life of Ursa and in turn impacts how she will live her life. Although one must wonder, since three of the major concerns of Corregidora are gender conflicts, sexual dysfunction and inability to love without hurting or allowing one's self to be hurt, if Ursa's return to Mutt is the beginning of her healing or a denial of it.

In Jones's Eva's Man, statements about the gypsy, great-grandmother Medina and the Queen Bee become important factors in shaping how Eva Medina sees herself and guides her life actions. Eva's witnessing to the life and myth of the Queen Bee and her actions of orally castrating Davis's penis serve as testimony for the traumatizing abuse black women can experience. The novel's endings are so ambivalent that past and current criticism of each text has yet to end debate as to whether either woman ever heals herself. However, unlike Ursa, Eva does not possess the tools to begin a healing process to heal herself or others, for she has lost her inability to connect through her community. At least with Ursa, there is always the possibility that healing has or will happen. In both novels, readers mostly see how witnessing and testifying have negatively impacted the protagonists' lives. We briefly receive glimmers of how the communality of oral traditions might positively affect the community and the individual. However, in The Healing, Jones finally provides us with that crucial and vital component of the oral, communality.


7. However, given that sickness and ailment entail a certain amount of pain, I am certain that someone could examine African American women's trope of healers as an exploration of S/M. But this text is more interested in pleasure.

Chapter 3

1. Ross's “Camping the Dirty Dozens: The Queer Resources of Black Nationalist Invective” is an amazing assessment of the "potential interplay between the dozens as a mode of street-smart verbal jousting affiliated with urban, working-class, supermasculine (i.e., avowedly heterosexual) African American culture since at least the early twentieth century and camp as a mode of in-the-know verbal repartee usually affiliated with underground urban European-American homosexual male enclaves since at least the early
twentieth century and before the emergence of militant gay liberation” (291).

2. There are two major works by black female critics, Trudier Harris and Elise A. Williams, that will be mentioned throughout this chapter that in various ways discuss the breaking of taboos by Moms Mabley. Williams’s *The Humor of Jackie Moms Mabley* provides a detailed and interesting book-length critique on the career and life of Moms Mabley.

3. In *Lettin’ It All Hang Out* and an interview at NYshow.com, RuPaul explains how his mother loved Page affected him and his love for the comedienne.

4. Though there are few biographical entries on Page’s career before *Sanford and Son*, Jason Buchanan’s biosketch of Page included in the *New York Times* and *All Media Movie Guide Database* offers these gems about Page’s early career. Watkins’s text also contains some tidbits about the comedienne.

5. In *Bodies That Matter*, Butler remedies her attention to race and performance of gender and desire with a complex interrogation of Nella Larsen’s *Passing*, but Halberstam perceptively observes the importance of vernacular in Black women’s performance of masculinity.

6. In their song “I Wanna Hot Dog for My Roll,” Susie and Butterbeans play off the sexual innuendo with lines such as “Listen, I want a dog without bread, you see” and later “Because I carries my bread with me” (Dance, *Honey, Hush*, 319).

7. Some theories that draw on the idea that the fact that Christ was a man suggests that he engaged in sexual relations with a prostitute, and this relationship resulted in them having children.

8. Bill Cosby was the most vocal critic of the show.

9. The audience member was making reference to Givens’s previous act on *Def Comedy Jam*, where she makes a joke about the size of her lips and the act of fellatio. The joke presents this memorable gem for audience members of Queen of Comedy: “My big ass lips, his little ass dick it’d be like tryin’ to give a whale a tic-tac. That shit wouldn’t work!”

10. See Spears’s discussion on black culture and class conflicts, p. 229.


12. Troy Patterson’s review of the *Queens of Comedy* stated it “might as well be called ‘How Stella Got Her #@*! Back.’” The performers try both to foster a vibe of sisterly respect and to talk about the sex act in the least self-respectful way possible. (*Entertainment Weekly* 23). In *Apollo Guide Video Review* of Queens of Comedy, Ryan Cracknell also voiced an inability to understand: “A lot of the jokes don’t generate laughs for me, simply because I don’t find them funny, I guess I just didn’t get it. This film is geared primarily toward a female audience. It talks about the dirty little secrets that men often prefer to avoid and experiences that exclude men because of their anatomy. . . . Ultimately, these self-proclaimed ‘Queens of Comedy’ are reminiscent of a band of cackling court jesters that refuses to go away.”

**Chapter 4**

1. The very definition of queer made it possible for critics such as Pat Califia (“Gay Men, Lesbians, and Sex: Doing it Together,”), Jan Clausen (“My Interesting Condition,” 11–21), and David Halperin (*One Hundred Years of Homosexuality and Other Essays on Greek Love*) to begin theorizing the various dimensions of sexual desire that expands the definition of object choice in discussions of sexual orientation.
2. Although I am focused on the more pervasive masculine and homophobic presentations of black nationalism, Lubiano’s assessment can also be corroborated by Huey P. Newton’s “The Women’s Liberation and Gay Liberation Movements.” While Newton asserts a stance to unite black power movements with women and gay liberation movements, he also acknowledges that “there has been some uncertainty about how to relate to these movements. . . . sometimes our first instinct is to want to hit a homosexual in the mouth, and want a woman to be quiet” (387). Clearly, the founder of black power recognizes how homophobia and sexism has manifested itself in Black nationalism, and this recognition further substantiates my claims.

3. In an especially damning critique of Marxism and national liberation movements, Robinson demonstrates how nationalism becomes conflated with racialism. His argument reveals that periods of nationalism in Europe are really imperialism (44–68).

4. Despite the way Ifi Amadiume’s Male Daughters, Female Husbands: Gender and Sex in African Society displaces the heterosexual nuclear family model, she dismisses thoughts of lesbianism in Africa. Nevertheless, Stephen O. Murray and Will Roscoe provide a much-needed edited collection of essays on the subject with the publication of their Boy-Wives and Female Husbands: Studies of African Homosexualities.

5. Their essays can be found in Delroy Constantine-Simms’s The Greatest Taboo: Homosexuality in Black Communities.

6. Cathy Cohen’s groundbreaking text The Boundaries of Blackness has already examined the impact of the issues in the era of AIDS and its detrimental impact on black people.

7. In Sula and Paradise, Toni Morrison utilizes the sacred and the profane aspects of tricksterism to propel her novels forward. Paule Marshall’s Praisesong for the Widow and John A. William’s The Man Who Cried I Am often utilizes trickster references to help their protagonist return to a healthy use of the body and the erotic in their physical and spiritual lives.


9. Marlon Ross’s “Some Glances at the Black Fag: Race, Same-Sex Desire, and Cultural Belonging” observes that we must “bring into view the cultural role of the black faggot” (501).

10. For example, Roberts moves from discussing a slave’s theft from his master (199) and a conjurer named Railroad Bill (200) to Stackolee and John Hardy (203–209). These figures serve as outlaw heroes who employ their lack of citizenship in the United States to ignore the prescribed social morals of their time. Though they often break white society’s laws, they enhance the quality of life for themselves or other blacks through their trickster actions (214–215).

11. See Laura Makarius’s “The Myth of the Trickster: The Necessary Taboo Breaker” (66–86) and Lawrence Levine’s Black Culture and Black Consciousness (332–34) for a discussion of the body and tricksterism. Levine briefly explores sexual stereotypes of black
sexual superiority in black comedy and laughter derived from slave culture (racialized sexuality).

12. Levine, who records this tale from North Carolina, does not make an attempt to explain or explore the significance of homosexuality in this text (333).

13. As is the case in all colonies of social bees, the only sexually mature female honeybee is the queen. When she flies away from the nest to mate, she gives off an odor (a pheromone) that the drones find irresistible, and they follow her. The streamlined queen flies faster and higher than the majority of the short, stocky drones. As she soars upward, many of them give up the pursuit. From the few drones that can follow her as she continues on a rising, whirling flight, she chooses one to couple with. After mere seconds her mate falls dying to the ground, and she chooses another (Britannica Online).

14. For years, one of New York’s Black newspapers in the 1920s, Inter-state Tattler, carried a column specifically centered on stories on female polygamists, wives caught cheating, etc.

15. Years later, Angela Davis, whom these blaxploitation character were constructed from, had to endure immense scrutiny about her sexuality after she publicly expressed dissatisfaction with the separatist agenda of the Million Man March. This was not a situation of life mirroring art, merely a reiteration that the debate around political correctness of characters, stemming from an unresolved issue of sexual desires and political agendas in the African American community.

16. This is not an error. The author spells her name exactly as I have recorded it.

17. See Sagri Dhairyam’s “Racing the Lesbian, Dodging White Critics” for an insightful discussion of black female same sex desire and the Western and Eurocentric construction of lesbianism. Like Lorde, Dhairyan questions the category of lesbian and suggests that renaming it creates controversy among white gay and lesbian critics.

18. Bogus explicitly says that the “Queen B aspires to be and generally succeeds as a singer whose music contributes to and influences the world in which she lives” (279).


20. In 1933 Bogan also recorded another song that positions her sexuality as commodity, “Barbecue Bess”: “I got a sign on my door, ’Barbecue for Sale,’/I’m talkin’ bout my barbecue, only thing I crave,/And that good doin’ meat, gon’ carry me to my grave. /I’m sellin’ it cheap, ’cause I got good stuff.”

Chapter 5

1. In the case of Gayl Jones, a recent comprehensive collection on Gayl Jones, Fiona Mills and Keith B. Mitchell’s After the Pain, does take into consideration Jones’s deconstructions of binary sexualities. As For Toni Morrison, in a number of interviews collected in Conversations with Toni Morrison she likens writing to a type of modern-day divination and insists on revisions of trickster narratives with her fictional novels Sula, Tar Baby, and Song of Solomon. And since trickster has been described as queer in this work and sup-
ported as such by many works before my own, Smith’s lesbian reading of *Sula* isn’t the work of some critic gone mad. Were that the case, it would invalidate Morrison’s own dissection of the Africanist presence in American literature that she speaks about in *Playing in the Dark*.

2. See this essay for a full discussion on the place of the bourgeois concept of the novel in black culture versus the place of folk and oral culture.

3. Psychologist M. L. Johnson creates the terms “Black-identified lesbigays” and “gay-identified lesbigays,” but Connerly’s essay exposes the depth of how this politic of identity shapes the emerging black queer nation.

4. In “Women in a Southern Time,” secondary character Louella classifies bulldagger as a Black woman with “short, wavy hair slicked back” and who wears “a man’s starchy white shirt opened at the collar and gray, pegged pants with a zipper in front.” The main character, Eulah Mae, after initial curiosity, invites the woman over to her table to join her (119–20). Eulah Mae later sleeps with her white female employer, presumed to be less butch, who presents a comfortableness with her same-sex desire that Eulah Mae cannot have in her southern black community of the 1940 and 1950s.

5. Muñoz discusses a similar type of disidentification with queer women of color doing anticolonial work that must inevitably broach Fanon and readings of him as homophobic and misogynistic (9).

6. Frank Phillips in his review in *Black World* and Jewelle Gomez in “A Cultural Legacy Denied and Discovered” perceive of Shockley’s work as a denial of blackness.

7. Both E. Patrick Johnson and Roderick Ferguson discuss the ramifications of projecting the black body as abnormal or deviant in the context of whiteness as the queering of blackness.

8. In the appendix of *Liberation, Imagination, and the Black Panther Party*, the “Revolutionary Peoples” Constitutional Convention September 1970, Philadelphia Workshop Reports, shows that some black nationalist had included gender and gay and lesbian issues of self-determination into liberation agendas.

9. Annamarie Jagose describes the ethnic identity model that gay culture adopted in the 1990s over the liberationist model of the early gay liberation 1970s era.

10. Jaded views of bisexual women in “The Play” and a continuation of butch/femme role-playing in “Women in a Southern Time” are two of Shockley’s other tales that move beyond hetero/homo binaries of sexuality.

11. While there are a number of works on butch/femme in early white lesbian communities, the collected papers of Ira Goodson at the Schomburg Center for Black Culture and the documentary *Ruth Ellis: Living with Pride* provide close attention to Black lesbian communities.

12. Madeline Daivs, E. L. Kennedy, and Joan Nestle, all early advocates and critics of butch identity, have reprinted and new essays in *The Persistent Desire: A Femme-Butch Reader*. Also see Sue-Ellen Case, “Towards a Butch-Femme Aesthetic”; and Judith Butler’s “Imitation and Gender Subordination.” Butler, Roof, and Ellen-Case all argue in various ways that butch/femme offers a critique of binary heterosexuality.

13. Teresa de Lauretis in *The Practice of Love: Lesbian Sexuality and Perverse Desire* discusses the limited ways that gay and lesbian studies ignores race: “Thus as an equally troubling question in the burgeoning field of ‘gay and lesbian studies’ concerns the discursive constructions and constructed silences around the relations of race to identity and subjectivity in the practices of homosexualities and the representations of same-sex desire” (485).
14. The insistence for a community of Black lesbians whose objects of desire are black has, historically and in the fiction and analytical works of Black lesbians, always been the ideal. Even as Smith, Lorde, and others formed coalitions and relationships of various ethnic and racial backgrounds, the ideal was still there. Today, this is still the case. For example, when ULOAH (United Lesbians of African Heritage) has their annual event to celebrate lesbian communities it asks possible participants that only Black women attend, even as they also make a statement saying that they acknowledge and support Black women's choice to love and have relationships with whomever they desire.

15. Daryl Cumber Dance's “The Black Man and the White Woman” in *Shuckin’ and Jivin’* contains many tales about Black men pursuing white women and the costs of such pursuits. In addition, the legacy of lynching and anti-miscegenation laws upheld throughout the United States meant that Black men who did not stay away from white women would be punished.

16. While there are various slave narratives of white women verbally and physically abusing their Black female slaves, fictional accounts have been more detailed and graphic about white women's sexual abuse toward Black female slaves. Gayl Jones's *Corregidora* explores this issue. In addition, same-sex sexual abuse of black males is discussed by Harriet Jacobs in her slave narrative and Charles Clifton's groundbreaking speculative essay, “Rereading Voices from the Past.” Toni Morrison fictionalizes such abuse in *Beloved*.

17. For instance, Trudier Harris's “From Mammy to Militants: Domestics in Black American Literature,” and E. Patrick Johnson's *Appropriating Blackness* reread the Mammy. Ishmeele Reed's fictional Mammy Barracuda in *Flight to Canada* also aligns Mammy and Uncle Tom with militant traditions and views her as a sexual object.

18. The historical use of wigs for drag queens, the changing of hair for drag kings, or the length of hair for representing butch/femme roles in lesbian relationships indicates how huge a factor hair can be in representations of queerness.

**Chapter 6**

1. I am referring to Joyce A. Joyce's “The Black Canon: Reconstructing Black American Literary Criticism” and Barbara Christian's “The Race for Theory” and “The Highs and Lows of Black Feminist Criticism.” The work of both critics spawned subsequent responses that exposed ideological splits about the use of “high” theory in African American criticism.

2. Teresa Wiltz's “Meshell Ndegeocello Breaks Step With Pop” records Ndegeocello's commentary on her adolescent identity crisis with this statement about how she used her sexuality as an unsuccessful coping mechanism: “giving it to every Tom, Dick, Harry, Jane and Su, so . . . I could feel like I was really here.”

3. According to *Ice* magazine's interview with Ndegeocello's manager, Kofi Taha, Ndegeocello comes up with name Tyrone "Cookie" Goldberg as a way to separate the creative and business sides of herself on the *Cookie* CD project.

4. In addition to CD titles, song titles reflect that same knowledge: “6-Legged Griot,” “I'm Diggin' You (Like an Old Soul Record),” “Bla, Bla, Bla, Dyba, Dyba, Dyba,” and many others.

5. When talking about her recent project *Dance of the Infidel*, she positions it as her musical collective, the Spirit Music Jamia. Wiltz observes that "Jamia,” meaning a gather-
ing or meeting, serves as the perfect word for Ndegeocello’s organizing of all star musicians that play and sing music she writes and produces.

6. In addition to the works discussed in this chapter, see Marilyn Sander Mobley’s *Folk Roots and Mythic Wings in Sarah Orne Jewett and Toni Morrison: The Cultural Function of Narrative*, Kenneth Porter’s “The Flying Africans,” Michael Gomez’s *Exchanging Our Cultural Marks*, and Nadia Elia’s “‘Kum Buba Yali Kum Buba Tamba, Ameen, Ameen, Ameen’: Did Some Flying Africans Bow to Allah?” Arguably Black creative efforts have yielded the trope in a similar manner. Fictional works include Richard Wright’s *Native Son*, Toni Morrison’s *Song of Solomon*, Paule Marshall’s *Praisesong for the Widow*, Ishmael Reed’s *Flight to Canada*, and Ralph Ellison’s short story “Flying Home.” In addition to *Sankofa*, other films that incorporate the trope are *Daughters of the Dust* and *The Last Supper*. Let us forget Black popular music, which at times broadens the trope: Lionel Hampton’s “Flying Home,” Sam Cooke’s classic “I’ll Fly Away,” and the Commodores’ “Zoom.”

7. See Mark Anthony Neal’s “Revolutionary Soul Singa,” in which he coins the long but appropriate term for Ndegeocello’s postmodernist identity as a soul musician.


9. See Melville and Frances Herskovits’s *Rebel Destiny* and *Suriname Folklore* for African songs and tales about buzzards, flight, and magic that makes its way through the African diaspora.

10. Since the nineteenth century, African Americans have often taken up this type of sex work. In my project on Black sex culture, I examine how Paschal Beverly Randolph creates an entire career from his theory of sex magic in the late nineteenth century. And we should not forget the various love and sexual potions created by conjurers such as Kitty Brown, Marie Leveau, and others.

11. All of these selections come from Ndegeocello’s *Peace Beyond Passion*. The CD thematically centers around issues of sexual colonization carried out through a specific religious institute, Christianity. She takes up issues of religion, homophobia, self-hate because of sexuality, the limitations of gender roles, and finding god in self.

12. Not to mention her forays in doing so-called non-Black music. She’s performed and worked with John Mellencamp; she covered an old Dolly Parton classic for a collection to celebrate the artist; and she has performed live with the Rolling Stones, Madonna, Alanis Morissette, and Lenny Kravitz.


14. In Greek mythology, Andromeda is the goddess daughter of two other supreme beings. *OED Online* states that etymology of the name as *andros* (man) and *medesthai* (to be mindful of). Given the etymology and the myth of Andromeda being rescued from an unwanted marriage to a sea god, being mindful of man could lead to other possible subjects for desire. Milky Way connects to lactation and the milk of the female.

15. Both the growth of AIDS among heterosexual Black women and the misrepresentations of bisexuals as sexually promiscuous and unsafe have increased suspicion and misunderstanding of Black bisexual men. Rather than being projected as a legitimate sexual identity, Black bisexual men have been demonized as “down-low” brothers.

16. Before her death, June Jordan was a bad-ass trickster outlaw who exemplified my claim.
17. In her article, Jamison quotes the rapper as positioning herself as breaking new ground (339).

18. In her cover of the Bill Withers's soul classic “Who Is He and What Is He To You?” Ndegeocello continues her performance of bisexuality as a narrative by not changing the pronouns in the song to align with normative gender designs of her position as a female singer. She questions a female lover’s infidelity.

19. In Dahomey, Herskovits’ recording of the tale recounts: “Legba began at once to play with Gbadu before their parent, and when reproached merely pointed out that since his organ was always to be erect, Mawu had herself decreed such conduct from him. This is why Legba dances: he tries to take any woman who is at hand” (205–206).

20. A student of go-go from an early age, Ndegeocello joined a go-go band called Prophecy in her native Washington, D.C. She’s also played with Little Bennie and the Masters and Rare Essence. As Wiltz notes, Ndegeocello represented a rare female presence in the male-dominated go-go scene.

21. Butler argues that “when the phallus is lesbian, then it is and is not a masculinist figure of power, the signifier is significantly split, for it both recalls and displaces the masculinism by which it is impelled” (Bodies That Matter 89).

Chapter 7

1. Pretensions aside, the article could possibly be seen as informative for those who did not know the difficulties facing young Black women today.

2. The very notion of a hip-hop feminist seems not all that solid given that female hip-hop culture, while concerned with female empowerment, constructs itself as an antithesis to white and bourgeois female culture in the United States. But it is a solid marketing tool for those interested in discourses of feminism and the culture of hip-hop.

3. In addition to the previously cited Viallrosa piece, in 2002 Essence published articles like “The War on Girls: Sex, Lies and Videos” by Joan Morgan and “Lunch with Latifah: Seven Teens, One Queen and an Afternoon of Straight Talk.” It can’t get any straighter.

4. Hype, a short-lived sketch show on WB in 2000, once mocked the forcefulness of the pose by performing a skit that was to be a commercial for Lil’ Kim’s breakfast cereal. As the actress imitating Kim pitches the breakfast cereal, she makes sure that the camera captures the legs-wide-open pose by sitting on tables, chairs, and counters in a way that positions her crotch prominently before the camera. Notably, the box of cereal sits between her legs with each shot.

5. See Chuck Creekmur’s “Trina Says Men Controlled Her Image” or Vanessa Satten’s “Up Close and Personal” for Foxy and Trina’s shirking of responsibility for controlling their images in videos and magazines.

6. See Richard von Krafft-Ebing’s Psychopathia Sexualis, 265. Krafft-Ebing’s discussion moves female ejaculation from the norm to being associated with a deviant social population.

7. In addition to Web sites by homohop groups such as Rainbow Flava and Deep Dick Collective, here are several articles that discuss the movement: Billy Jam, “Hip Hop Shop: The Queer Report”; Indigo Escobar, “Homos in the House, Gay Rappers Morplay Are Down and [Out]”; and Doug Norman’s “The Identity Politics of Queer Hip-hop.”
Conclusion

1. In the edited collection *Black Literature and Literary Theory*, essays written by Gates and Jay Edwards took an overly formalistic poststructuralist approach to trickster and trickster tales. Produced during the onslaught of structuralist and poststructuralist criticism, there were really impressive charts and awe-inspiring graphs included within their essays from the collection, as well as in non-trickster-related essays in the collection.

2. Annamarie Jagose’s *Queer Theory* charts the development of gay and lesbian political movements. As she charts the changes over the last forty years, Jagose shows how the mainstream gay and lesbian movement moved away from a liberatory model, which included an annihilation of gender and sexuality as we know it, to an ethnic model that imitates and uses strategies from the civil rights movement.