Against a Sharp White Background

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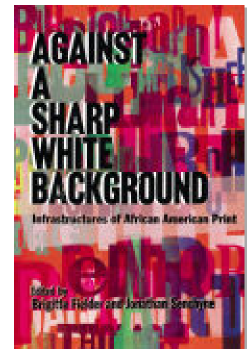

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Introduction

Infrastructures of African American Print

Brigitte Fielder and
Jonathan Senchyne

Books and black lives . . . still matter.
Prince Rogers Nelson

We're always already in the book. We've always already been in the book.
Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson

Black Man in Baton Rouge, Alton Sterling, Becomes a Hashtag," read an online headline in July 2016.[1] Sterling, a thirty-seven-year-old African American man, had been pinned to the ground and shot dead at point-blank range by two Baton Rouge police officers. The headline makes no mention of these circumstances, but by mid-2016, it did not have to. This phrase, "becomes a hashtag," communicated that someone had died, the race of the dead, the profession of the killer, and the political contexts in which the event would be received. A day later, Philando Castile would "become a hashtag" during a traffic stop in Minnesota. Speaking out against police killings of black men in the United States, the musician Drake told his followers on Instagram, "Alton Sterling being killed . . . left me feeling disheartened, emotional, and truly scared. . . . No one begins their life as a hashtag. Yet the trend of being reduced to one continues."[2]

To be reduced to a hashtag is to be a subject at the intersection of the unequal and white supremacist distribution of violence and the affordances of information infrastructures of the twenty-first century. On its face, a hashtag is a keyword or phrase preceded by the pound sign through which multiple tweets from different users can be immediately indexed. It was first conceived as a way to organize affinity groups within Twitter's parameters—constraints dictated by the limits of SMS (short message service), or cellular phone text messaging, in 2006. The first hashtag was used to organize a happy hour tech conversation. Over time, however, hashtagging evolved into a complex social indexing system sometimes for virtual community and other times for organization "in real life." Hashtagging the name of the dead emerged out of this context to do both; it is a common method to raise public awareness about under- or misreported police violence and to organize in-person protest actions. Further, when #BlackLivesMatter emerged as a major organizational frame for antiracist civil rights protest after the killing of Trayvon Martin and then Michael Brown, we witnessed an indexical technology of information organization that became both the method of large-scale distributed political organization and a signifier of people's racial consciousness.

The hashtag itself comes to be an indexing mark through which lost black lives are simultaneously memorialized and tagged as belonging to this broader context of black death. Signs held at marches ask "Am I the Next Hashtag?" suggesting that this indexical form stretches into a future containing the sad probability of more police brutality. The hashtag stands in waiting for the name of a person whose death will be indexed by it, just as Claudia Rankine, in *Citizen*, leaves blank spaces on the page for future names of the coming dead:

In Memory of Jordan Russell Davis
In Memory of Eric Garner
In Memory of John Crawford
In Memory of Michael Brown
In Memory
In Memory
In Memory . . .[3]

Subsequent editions of *Citizen* would revise page 134 to add additional names to this list. The litany gets longer: Sharonda Coleman-Singleton . . . Ethel Lee Lance . . . Clementa Pinckney . . . Sandra Bland. Alton Sterling. Philando Castile. By continually updating this page, Rankine makes the problem of institutional racist violence a problem of print. This filling up of the page over the

course of the book's editions makes the continually rising body count legible. If the pattern continues, soon the page will be full, with no more open spaces for memorialization. What then?

Those of us for whom black lives matter must worry about which loved ones might come to fill in these spaces of memorialization. The words "In Memory" fade into a light shade of gray as they repeat down Rankine's page, waiting to be amended with more names. Similarly, the hashtag form waits to be filled in with the names of the next people to be killed. In both these examples, medium specific forms give shape to the experience of mourning the destruction of black life in advance. "I find it hard to separate #BlackLivesMatter from Trayvon Martin, Mike Brown, Tamir Rice, Sandra Bland, and Philando Castile," Rankine said in a recent interview. "All their deaths exist together. Whenever I see the hashtag I immediately see those faces. They come forward in one instantaneous gesture."[4]

This "one instantaneous gesture" that Rankine observes and represents on *Citizen*'s pages is legible at the intersection of information technology and racialization. It suggests the extent to which each informs the other, and it refuses their separation. Black life, specifically, is lived at risk of becoming a hashtag. Beyond the technical limits of Twitter, being reduced to a hashtag also depends upon the processes of racialization in a racially oppressive nation. Racialization is a process of indexing people and groups within authoritative discourses of white supremacy. Racial taxonomies have been produced and perpetuated through various structures of oppression, from the pseudoscience of racial categorization to the legal ordering that made enslaved children follow the "condition of the mother" despite their father's legal or racial status. Race is a system for assigning meaning, a structure that systematically affords certain possibilities and restricts others. As Roderick Ferguson writes, race is "a category that sets the terms of belonging and exclusion within modern institutions."[5] Racialized meaning is assigned through various available mechanisms and signs for articulating, defining, identifying, and policing race. Just as race structures one's experiences of belonging and exclusion, racism relies upon cultural infrastructures for its perpetuation.

Zora Neale Hurston famously wrote, "I feel most colored when I am thrown against a sharp white background."[6] This is to say that racial identity, and the norms and risks that attend its specific form, is not simply an expression of one's inherent self but rather is a constant negotiation of power within a field of others. We draw our book's title from Hurston's words not to center discussions of whiteness but to acknowledge the additional antiracist work inherent to African American print culture studies. This work has crafted itself alongside

the backdrop of a predominantly white field that has necessitated the additional labor of working against existing structures of exclusion and erasure while also producing the innovative creative work, conversations, and methodological practices of African American print culture. African American print has also established itself within the broader context of anti-black violence in which, as Christina Sharpe notes, "Black deaths are produced as normative" while this fact "still leaves gaps and unanswered questions for those of us in the wake of those specific and cumulative deaths."[7] Against these various and historical forms of physical violence, structural exclusion, and attempts at rhetorical erasure, the work of African American print culture often responds to such gaps and unanswered questions, becoming itself a form of resistance and antitheses to black death.

What is so powerfully clarifying about Hurston's articulation of her own racialization "against a sharp white background" is that she makes visible for her readers the usually invisible background against which her race becomes highly legible and against which the social constraints of her otherness—of being "colored" in 1928—are most apparent. Hurston's turn to the "white background" refuses to isolate her racialized self outside the larger frame in which she can be indexed as black. She refuses the invisibility of the racializing infrastructure (i.e., whiteness) that surrounds her and produces her intensified racial identification. Glenn Ligon quotes these lines from Hurston in his 1990 painting *Untitled (I Feel Most Colored When I Am Thrown against a Sharp White Background)*. Ligon's painting repeats these words, and as they cascade down the white board, the black letters begin to run together, stalling legibility by complicating the black/white binary. Extending Hurston's provocative framing of blackness, Ligon's work queries how textual media and racial identification rely on similar visual technologies to make meaning.

In *Citizen*, Rankine uses this Ligon painting to theorize how, in predominantly white settings, a black person's presence is made to appear as "anger."[8] Black anger is produced against a usually invisible framing whiteness: "It responds to insult and attempted erasure simply by asserting presence, and the energy required to present, to react, to assert is accompanied by visceral disappointment: a disappointment in the sense that no amount of visibility will alter the ways in which one is perceived."[9] Venus and Serena Williams become Rankine's touchstone for this idea of black presence appearing as anger within white infrastructures of sense making: "What does a victorious or defeated black woman's body in a historically white space look like?" "Crazy" is one answer Rankine floats as she watches Serena Williams, in a single moment of the 2009 US Open, dispense with the long history of injustice she suffered at

the hands of opponents, judges, and fans.[10] But after reflecting on Hurston's lines materialized in Ligon's painting, Rankine remembers that the Williams sisters have always been "graphite against a sharp white background" and that while they have been "win[ning] sometimes . . . los[ing] sometimes" and variously "happy . . . [and] sad" over the years, their victories, losses, emotions, and experiences are only ever read as black and angry by "those people who were enraged they were there at all."[11] Through a figure like Serena Williams, we see how the built-in assumptions of antiblack backdrops seek to depress and flatten out the appearance of black excellence, making all her happiness, sadness, injury, and triumph appear as monochromatic black "anger." But it also becomes clear, to Rankine and others who watch Serena's game, that her ability, her expression of tennis, has exceeded and transformed what the rules and previous logics of the game thought possible. The essays in this volume attend to both of these possible relations to the infrastructures of inscription. They explore not only how white supremacist histories and infrastructures have limited and foreclosed black expression but also how black expression has extended, recoded, and transformed some of these very structures, affording new possibilities.

Historian of information Paul N. Edwards describes "infrastructures" as the "macro, meso, and micro scales of time, space, and social organization" that "form the stable," yet often invisible, "foundation of modern social worlds." "To be modern," Edwards argues, "is to live within and by means of infrastructures, and . . . to inhabit, uneasily, the intersection of these multiple scales" through the technologies that maintain them. Infrastructures tend to maintain and produce the social and technological world around us "without our realizing they are doing so."[12] Like the whiteness that Hurston notices producing an intensified version of her blackness, infrastructures "function for us, both conceptually and practically, as environment, as social setting, and as the invisible, unremarked basis" for experience.[13] This general invisibility of infrastructure does not suggest its passivity, however. One definition of the term "infrastructure" is its reference to the "permanent installations forming a basis for military operations."[14] This militarized resonance speaks to infrastructure's hegemonic policing force. Infrastructure is a structure of "invisible, unremarked" power, and rendering this visible—remarkable—as Hurston and others have done is to speak to power by revealing infrastructure's inner workings.

As Edwards notes, infrastructure is also understood broadly to describe any "important, widely shared, human-constructed resource . . . needed for the functioning of a community or society," including "communication systems."[15]

Book history and print culture studies, then, have much in common with the study of infrastructure. Robert Darnton's canonical essay, "What Is the History of Books?" contains a well-known illustration of what he calls the "communication circuit," or the ecology of printers, papermakers, bookbinders, warehousers, and booksellers who silently conduct contact between readers and writers.[16] We turn to infrastructure as a rubric that encompasses how the essays within this volume conceive of the history of African American print and expressive cultures.

This is an explicit response to the predominant tendency of book history and studies of print and digital cultures to ignore their intersections with race and, more specifically, with African American craft and expression. Leon Jackson has written about an impasse in the "relationship between scholars of African American literature . . . and those who study books as economic or material artifacts." "Neither has listened to, or understood, the other," he writes.[17] Jackson's 2010 "state of the discipline" essay in the journal *Book History* has been an important recent catalyst for work across disciplinary divides between book history and African American studies. Unfortunately, he overstates the equality of inattention on "both sides." It is difficult to square the notion that African American literary studies has not taken up the methods of book history and print culture studies with Frances Smith Foster's meticulous archival and bibliographical work locating, describing, and analyzing early Afro-Protestant periodicals and Jean Fagan Yellin's manuscript research authenticating Harriet Jacobs's authorship of *Incidents in the Life of a Slave Girl*.[18] One might further mention the vast amount of textual editing that went into preparing these works for modern scholarly editions. Much of the foundational work of recovering African American literary works and making them available for scholarship would have been impossible if African Americanists were not also scholars of print culture and book history.

In the other direction, Jackson rightly points out the neglect of African American print culture by scholars who primarily identify themselves as book historians and takes their primary journals as evidence: "There is not a single essay on an African American topic in *Studies in Bibliography*, only one in *Text*, together with two in *Book History*, two in *Textual Cultures*, and two in *Papers of the Bibliographical Society of America*." "From the most empirically grounded and traditional research to the most theoretically probing and abstract cogitations," Jackson writes, "scholarship growing out of the history of the book and related fields has rarely spoken to, or been addressed by, scholars of African American literary and cultural history."[19] As we discuss later, the founding of the Center for the History of Print Culture in Modern America (which is today the Center

for the History of Print and Digital Culture) was motivated by a sense that the discipline of Americanist book history was consolidating around white, New England subjects before the Reconstruction period. Early concentration of scholarship within that frame structurally excluded a great deal of African American and other minority print cultures.

The essays that follow explore how race and racialization are constructed and encountered within information infrastructures ranging from digital databases of early black print to the visual and material cultures of contemporary black artists. Taken together, the essays collected here also ask the important question of how race and racialization shape information infrastructures. The reflexive relationship between African American expression and the infrastructures it moves through—and, importantly, changes—is the centerpiece of the work collected here.

In the midst of increased interest in African American print culture over the last decade, the scholars writing here challenge various fields not only to think about individual exemplars—particular black publications, authors, and artists—but also to be attentive to how expressions emerge out of and are received within the larger technosocial platforms that make them possible. Book history and print culture studies have long sought to understand the production and consumption of texts within the broad "communications circuit" beyond an idealized reader-author relationship. In the cognate field of textual digital humanities, the book historical questions of how texts come to be used and read have developed into a critical self-questioning of how we as scholars gain access to and create knowledge within such networks. This "infrastructural turn" in the digital humanities comes at the urging of scholars such as Alan Liu and Safiya Noble who have challenged the field to be critical of its own relation to technology and the social structures of knowledge production in the twenty-first-century university and workplace.[20] The essays that follow make both of these turns. They are attentive to the historical technologies of print or circumstances of authorship that they take up while also emphasizing the larger contextual systems that enabled or stymied any particular text or event. For example, while it is exciting and necessary to do recovery work on early black writing and print, it is equally necessary to study the historical library bibliographical standards and contemporary digital architectures that kept such works "hidden" and in need of recovery today.

Throughout this volume, the authors also challenge us to think of overlapping or intersecting infrastructures. An information architecture like the digital database that executes commands using Boolean operators is complicated by the intersecting technologies of race in the nineteenth century, when an African

American person might sign her name with an X or an asterisk. These overlapping frames require us to ask larger questions about how racialized people mediate themselves into the world and whether our tools for research and habits of thought are equipped to see these possibilities. Whether parsing what it means to become a hashtag or a contemporary artist's remediation of nineteenth-century advertisements that required a special typographical character depicting the silhouette of a "runaway slave," the work collected here insists on the necessity of thinking technologies and techniques of racialization together.

The intersection of these two systems of meaning making—of making race and making expression—is where this volume begins. This process of making meaning is both cumulative and contextual, historical and presentist; racial experience is structured through a past whose resonance reaches into the present and the ever-changing moment of the "now." How racial expression exists in the world is particularly interesting when the invisible systems of meaning making that we call infrastructure and these structures of distributing violence and opportunity called racialization come together. The infrastructures of African American print culture are both constituted by and work to constitute African American identity and experience. As Frances Smith Foster writes, "African-American print culture became a primary tool in constructing African America, in ensuring the protection and progress of the 'race' or the 'nation' not only in defending themselves from libelous or ignorant attacks by other Americans but even more for reconstructing individual and group definitions and for advocating behaviors and philosophies that were positive and purposeful."[21] African American print production has labored to counter powers of oppression by constructing and claiming racialization on its own antiracist terms. The work in this volume emphasizes the importance of attention to how race in the United States and African American expressions are both produced through the affordances (the possibilities made available by the form) of different media.

This is indeed an important time for thinking and writing on African American print in particular, although this project as a whole is far from new. Interest in the relevance and resonances of African American print production for black people in the United States and throughout the black Atlantic began with the early production of African American print culture itself.[22] Editors and compilers of black writing, ranging from Samuel Cornish, John Russworm, Frederick Douglass, and Elisha Weaver to Alice Dunbar-Nelson, W. E. B. Du Bois, Alain Locke, and John Harold Johnson, have worked to create and curate this print culture. Foundational scholarship on the long history and various forms of African American print by scholars such as Dorothy Porter Wesley,

Nellie Y. McKay, Henry Louis Gates Jr., Frances Smith Foster, William Andrews, John Ernest, Eric Gardner, Elizabeth McHenry, Jean Fagan Yellin, Lois Brown, P. Gabrielle Foreman, Joycelyn Moody, Xiomara Santamarina, Nicole N. Aljoe, and others has opened up the field, so to speak. In recovery work, the creation of edited collections of primary sources, and digital projects, scholars have not only continued the work begun by early black studies scholars but also made this work resonate well beyond the "specialization" of "ethnic studies" fields.

Over the past decade, collections seeking to bring together new work on African American print cultures have continued to appear, not simply marking out territory but inviting further conversation. These have included books or journal issues such as Lara Langer Cohen and Jordan Alexander Stein's *Early African American Print Culture* (2012), George Hutchinson and John K. Young's *Publishing Blackness: Textual Constructions of Race since 1850* (2013), and, most recently, Joycelyn Moody and Howard Rambsy II's special issue of *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* on African American print cultures (2015). In their varying approaches and compilations of contributors, the editors of these recent collections have all emphasized the need for more work in this area of study. Our collection's centering on African American print builds upon the community of conversation in this scholarship. The continued increasing attention to African American print has resulted in what Moody and Rambsy refer to as "the current veritable explosion of black print culture studies." Moody and Rambsy ask what has occasioned this attention, speculating causes that include increased interest in print culture and in African American publications and the emerging digital landscape, which would come to facilitate this archival research.[23] In a similar vein, Hutchinson and Young write that "certain developments in textual scholarship meshed in interesting ways with central issues in African American literary study."[24] This interdisciplinary "meshing" of fields is evident in the inclusion of books like Cheryl Knott's *Not Free, Not for All: Public Libraries in the Age of Jim Crow* (2015) and Shawn Anthony Christian's *The Harlem Renaissance and the Idea of a New Negro Reader* (2016), in the University of Massachusetts Press's Studies in Print Culture and the History of the Book series. In noting this convergence of interests, the importance of print culture for understanding African American studies should not, however, be prioritized above the importance of African American studies for understanding print culture. To do so would be to perpetuate the co-optation of African American research subjects without the inclusion and support of African American scholars, librarians, and archivists within universities, archives, conferences, and publications.

We approach this volume foremost by recognizing the necessity of more work on African American print and digital culture. As we have discussed this project, we have also considered our own responsibilities in taking up this work as labor done in the spirit of a shared scholarly practice that must, in working toward antiracism, continually reexamine itself. As two differently raced scholars—a mixed-race African American woman and a white man—we are ever aware of how the privileges and challenges of individual embodiment, as well as academic expertise, come to bear upon this scholarly work. This is to say, we recognize that our different experiences and relationships to African American print via our own writing and teaching are also informed by our own experiences as racialized subjects and thereby our relationships to the very infrastructures of racialization informing the historically white supremacist institutions of the academy. Echoing similar concerns voiced by scholars such as Nellie McKay and Ann duCille, P. Gabrielle Foreman recently critiqued ongoing structural disparities in ethnic and gender studies fields, including the tendency of white academics to dabble in "black" areas of study while failing to recognize African Americanist work as its own field of scholarly expertise or to support and include black scholars in these projects.[25] While the final list of authors in an essay collection is largely dependent upon the simple fact of who is well-suited, interested, and able to submit their research at the right time, the importance of including and citing African American writers in a volume on African American expression cannot be overstated. As with other scholarly concerns regarding citational practices and representation on syllabi, we have considered the representation of scholars in this volume as also important to its construction. While necessary, however, this is not sufficient. Recalling Foucault, Foreman notes that "the question of 'who exercises power' cannot be resolved unless the other question '*how does it happen*' is resolved at the same time," noting how representation often masks "hidden entitlements."[26] Acknowledging the relationships between and among individual scholars and scholarly works and Foreman's "how" is one way of recognizing the importance of infrastructures and their attendant entitlements.

Attending to infrastructure is therefore a matter of methodological importance. In part, Foreman asks, how might we best "structure the responsibility of ensuring intellectually and demographically representative and field-invested diversity and participation? And what happens when such a structure doesn't exist or when a different (often unarticulated) one does?"[27] As Kimberly Blockett explains, Foreman and others are not calling for a simple numbers game of racial representation but for a "clear and sustained attention to how academic ethics engages underrepresented and marginalized groups, living and dead."[28] As we

orient this volume politically (acknowledging this scholarly work as always inherently political) and our own embodied selves to it (knowing that this political work cannot be divorced from our own respective embodiments) we endeavor to foster further attention to and engagement with African American print culture studies and also to recognize the infrastructures that have positively or negatively affected such attention and engagement. We have worked to bring together an array of scholars who range from senior to junior, those who specialize in African American studies and others who, though not specialists, recognize that African American contributions to and uses of print culture cannot be ignored in a broader national or global scope. We present this volume in the spirit of recognizing the need to attend to African American production and expression as a matter of course in various fields of scholarship that extend beyond black studies, the importance of doing this work well, the need to include—and to cite—black scholars in black studies scholarship, and the necessity to recognize our own racialized positions as we do this work. We further acknowledge that educational institutions of all kinds and in every structural unit must (continue to) work toward better supporting and including black scholars in every field and at every rank.

As we add our volume to this important body of work, we wish to acknowledge not only what we view as the timeliness of this academic area of study but also its relevance within the institutional context of our collection's organization and publication. As writers such as Roderick Ferguson and Sarah Ahmed have discussed, institutions structure people and knowledge in racialized ways.[29] The importance of race might also be gleaned from the connections Foster draws between the isolation of various disciplines within academic institutions and the prioritization of various forms of print culture over others: "We frequent silos of the known and preferred. We have greater access and more choices, but we see less and know little about the perspectives of others even as we proclaim inclusiveness and comprehensiveness."[30] Thinking about African American culture through various media is an inherently political project in the context of an academy that has historically isolated and deprioritized both black areas of scholarship and black scholars. We hold that it is therefore important to here call attention to the institutional context and conditions within which we have been editing this volume.

Twenty-five years ago, the Center for the History of Print Culture in Modern America—today the Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture—was founded at the University of Wisconsin–Madison with the expressly stated goal of "stimulating research into the print culture collections of groups whose gender, race, . . . ethnicity, and sexual orientation . . . have historically placed them

at the periphery of power but who used print . . . as one of the few means of expression available to them."[31] Part of a generation of scholars dedicated to revising and expanding canons and putting pressure on American exceptionalist historiography, the center's founders supported research in book history and print culture that looked beyond New England and the fetishization of rare or early imprints and instead foregrounded, in Wayne Wiegand's words, the "agency and practice" of diverse actors who created and used print "from below." The center's first edited book, *Print Culture in a Diverse America*, emphasized these themes, focusing on how diverse US minority communities used print from "the periphery of power." Twenty-five years later, we revisit similar territory while also acknowledging how political and intellectual urgencies in the present lead us to ask questions differently.

Specifically, the essays collected here show less interest in recovering the agency that black writers, editors, publishers, and artists found by participating in print culture. That has been, and continues to be, important work, necessary to expanding the scope of authors and works we can read, teach, and interpret. But the essays collected here approach African American print culture from different angles, considering the systems, expectations, and technologies that African American writers and artists had to engage. What if print and the infrastructures surrounding it might more often be constricting rather than freeing? The book form itself, two of our authors argue, might actually be inextricable from the history of antiblack racism. Twenty-five years ago the center's initial projects argued for links between print and the democratization of culture and power. We now note that if modernity and print are in some ways inextricable—and if modernity and antiblack racism are also in some ways inextricable—then we need to be more attentive in our thinking about what else books and print do in a diverse America.

Like *Print Culture in a Diverse America*, this book emerges from conversations begun in Madison, Wisconsin. It is important to note that the Center for the History of Print and Digital Culture's research focus on "African American Expression in Print and Digital Culture" and this volume's editors' conversations around this topic began in the wake of the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. In the ensuing months during which we organized this volume, the roll call of African American people who had become hashtags reached overwhelming numbers and came to include Madison's own Tony Robinson, a nineteen-year-old unarmed black man shot and killed by police on the city's popular Williamson Street in March 2015.[32] This litany of names was accompanied by a cataloging of the supposed infractions of those who have been killed by police and civilians alike. Renisha McBride could not seek

help after a car accident. Jordan Davis could not listen to loud music. Sandra Bland could not make a minor traffic infraction. Tamir Rice could not hold a toy gun. Like memorializing the dead through hashtagging, warnings against "——ing while black" became an Internet meme. These cautions against any action that might result in black death reveal the ways white supremacy structures a legal system that blames black victims rather than nonblack perpetrators and suggests the ultimate goal of white supremacy as the suppression of any kind of black expression whatsoever. The final words of Eric Garner have been taken as a metaphor for the current black condition in the United States: "I can't breathe."

Within this context, we have extended our initial thinking about African American expression in print and digital culture toward the ever-changing landscape within which African American people continue to express themselves. The media they have used ought not to be taken for granted. They have been painstakingly built, deliberately crafted, reclaimed and appropriated, wrenched and reclaimed from the hands of white supremacy, even under the direst of circumstances. In addition to those naming the various black people who had been murdered by police forces, the hashtag #BlackLivesMatter has been trending, reminding both black and nonblack people of the importance of black lives and the antiracist refusal to discount them, even when discounted under the law.

The setting for our conversations in this field and the publication of this collection is, of course, a predominantly white institution in a predominantly white city. The University of Wisconsin has not been untouched by these phenomena. During the spring 2016 semester, UW students of color began using #theRealUW hashtag (co-opted by students of color from its initial use as a tag to express support for UW's sports teams) to respond to a series of public incidents of racism on campus and recount their own experiences of racism that counter messages of school pride and supposed inclusivity. These tweets have since been preserved by library science students working within the University Archives through a graduate student–led project that sought to make sure this racialized history of the university is not absented from the archive. Also in the spring of 2016, campus police interrupted an Afro-American studies class to arrest a black student, an artist whose alleged infringement was creating antiracist graffiti on campus buildings, including one instance that warned, "Racizm in the air dont breathe." The structures that govern tend toward preserving white power, but African American expression has always challenged this power through the affordances of whichever infrastructures have been available—including those that are forbidden.

This volume is organized in three thematic sections: “Infrastructures,” “Paratexts,” and “Formats.” Essays within each section have particular affinities, but overlapping methods, themes, and questions spill out across these sections as well.

The first section, “Infrastructures,” sets the tone for the book’s overarching argument about the imbrication of systems that make race legible with systems that make texts legible. P. Gabrielle Foreman’s “Slavery, Black Visual Culture, and the Promises and Problems of Print in the Work of David Drake, Theaster Gates, and Glenn Ligon” opens the book with a tour-de-force reading that moves from antebellum print and inscription through present-day remediations of black print and early black expression in a temporally fugitive context. Foreman’s essay thinks about the transit of black print across geographies that could not be traversed by black people in the nineteenth century and across other barriers to the thriving of black life today. Foreman’s refusal to let black expression settle in any one scriptive form or temporal frame orients us toward both African American print and pottery, nineteenth-century newspaper fugitive ads and contemporary sculpture exhibits. Foreman issues a challenge to think beyond traditional boundaries for scholarly objects of study, for these texts, she demonstrates, were made to travel.

Foreman’s writing about the artist Theaster Gates is an apt setup for E. James West’s essay, “‘The Books You’ve Waited For’: *Ebony* Magazine, the Johnson Book Division, and Black History in Print,” since the Johnson Publishing Company archive now resides in Gates’s Stony Island Arts Bank, a community library / art space Gates opened in an abandoned bank on Chicago’s South Side. West explores the parallel development of the Johnson Publishing Company Book Division and the expansion of *Ebony* magazine’s historical content during the early 1960s. The Johnson Book Division was one of the earliest black book-publishing enterprises to emerge during the “black book boom” of the 1960s, and it would become one of the most prolific. Drawing on a range of previously untapped archival sources, including the papers of Book Division director Doris E. Saunders and *Ebony* senior editor Lerone Bennett Jr., this chapter sheds new light on the development of the Johnson Book Division and *Ebony*’s developing role as a “history book.” In doing so, it demonstrates the complex and frequently contested ways in which Johnson Publishing sought to adapt its output to the evolving demands of black print culture during the early 1960s.

West’s research focuses on the development of capacity in black publishing in response to the growing demand for black history, and Laura E. Helton’s chapter, “Making Lists, Keeping Time: Infrastructures of Black Inquiry,

1900–1950," shows how organizational and bibliographical structures were adapted and innovated by black bibliographers, librarians, and information workers. When their names find their way into scholarship, figures like Dorothy Porter and Vivian Harsh—librarians who, beginning in the 1930s, shaped the landscape of research for "Negro studies"—tend to dwell in the acknowledgments. "Mrs. Dorothy Porter's cooperativeness, patience, and resourcefulness were invaluable to us," wrote Sterling Brown in the opening pages of *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes*, for example; a generation later, in 1973, Benjamin Quarles noted that there hasn't been "a major black history book . . . in which the author hasn't acknowledged Mrs. Porter's help."[33] Thus located in paratext, such women have largely existed on the margin of any accounting of black thought. This essay asks what would happen if we considered curators like Harsh and Porter—and their cohort of other early black librarians—as key shapers of African American intellectual production in the twentieth century. What if we took seriously their collecting and classification work as mapping epistemologies of blackness? Such a recentering would provoke several reformulations of black print culture, Helton argues.

Rounding out this section, Jim Casey's "Parsing the Special Characters of African American Print Culture: Mary Ann Shadd and the * Limits of Search" extends Helton's information infrastructural questions into the twenty-first century by asking what happens at the intersection of nineteenth-century African American texts and contemporary digitization. Casey looks at nineteenth-century African American newspaper clippings in today's digital archives as "daisy chains of associated technologies" that do not necessarily stack well. Casey argues that we must be attentive to the affordances of both nineteenth-century black print and present-day search technologies in order to work with such texts. Casey demonstrates this claim through a reading of what happens to a person who signs their name with an asterisk within a Boolean search environment that parses the asterisk much differently from the human eye.

Beth A. McCoy and Jasmine Y. Montgomery's chapter, "Dionne Brand's *A Map to the Door of No Return* and the Antiblackness of the Book as an Object," opens the next section, "Paratexts." Throughout modernity, they argue, the book as an object has accumulated evidence of what Frank Wilderson calls the "ab initio" imbrication of "Blackness and Slaveness."[34] Dionne Brand's memoir *A Map to the Door of No Return* provides evidence for this claim. Through the book, Brand exercises a kind of print culture agency by documenting her refusal to visit a physical Door of No Return for fear she "will be destroyed." But that same book thwarts her agency. Through both its text and its paratext, *A Map to the Door of No Return* draws Brand to the threshold of the place she has

determined never to go. Indeed, the book suggests that agency is impossible, for Brand has already been destroyed: once ontologically as a fact of the Door and once again as a child who "fell into" a book "like a fish falling into water." In other words, Brand has already passed through the Door, for the book as an object functions not only as a record but also as an engine of creative destruction. Through *A Map to the Door of No Return*, modernity's book as an object reads as antiblack, its "cognitive schema" as "captivity."

Jesse A. Goldberg continues to put pressure on racial paratext in his study of how paratexts "perform." "Performative Paratexts: Postblackness, Law, and the Periodization of African American Literature" synthesizes the language of print and textuality studies with the vocabulary of performance studies to ask what the prefix "post-" does for conceptions of blackness called forth by the term "postblack." Through an investigation of African American print culture that highlights three signal periods of African American literary history—the Harlem Renaissance, the Black Arts Movement, and the postblack moment—Goldberg traces assertions of newness appearing in the paratexts of anthologies of African American literature. By tracing these assertions of newness as repetitions within a continuous tradition, Goldberg posits an alternative reading of African American literary traditions to that posited by Kenneth Warren or by proponents of postblackness, both of which, the chapter argues, capitulate to a periodization of history posited by US law. Ultimately, the chapter calls for scholars to work across disciplinary lines to think paratexts as performatives—to think print culture as performance—in order to open up possibilities for thinking literary history beyond the shadow of law and its racist violence.

Kinohi Nishikawa's "Richard Wright between Two Fronts: *Black Boy* in the Black Metropolis" examines the print reception of Richard Wright's *Black Boy* around the year of its publication, 1945. Nishikawa's analysis of that reception suggests that the autobiography, via its paratexts and generic performances, was caught between two "fronts": the Popular Front and the war front. Paying attention to how the book object and its text were performed differently in the social world it was published into offers a special index of America's transition into the era of Cold War liberalism. On the one hand, radicals viewed their former comrade with suspicion, dismissing him as a cog in the machine of American exceptionalism. On the other hand, a more mainstream assessment heard *Black Boy* as a clarion call for America's commitment to racial democracy. Moving between these fronts, Nishikawa shows how *Black Boy* became a flashpoint for competing ideologies at a time of significant cultural realignment.

Barbara Hochman's "Imitation, Racialization, and Interpretive Norms: Nella Larsen's 'Plagiarized' Story in *The Forum*" takes a new angle on expectations of originality, intellectual property, and periodical paratexts. In January 1930, three months after Nella Larsen's short story "Sanctuary" appeared in *The Forum*, the magazine printed a reader's letter noting the "striking resemblance" between Larsen's text and a story by Sheila Kaye Smith. The reader's letter was followed by an editorial note declaring Larsen innocent and Larsen's own "Author's Explanation." While these texts have drawn some scholarly commentary, they have not been considered within the framework of the periodical in which they appeared. Doing so helps explain to what extent and in what form racial matters could be addressed in a widely circulating publication designed for educated general readers of the 1920s. *The Forum* called itself "the magazine of controversy," but neither Larsen's story nor her defense fits the model of "controversy" promoted by the journal. The norms of debate in *The Forum* kept the deepest and most insidious aspects of racialization out of the picture. Hochman argues that Larsen, well aware of this unwritten ground rule, offered *The Forum* both a story and an "explanation" that skirt the complexities of racialized positioning she explores in her best work. With hindsight and historical perspective, Larsen's "Sanctuary" and her "Author's Explanation" become sardonic performances of acceptable "Negro" themes such as racial binaries and racial solidarity.

John Ernest, Rian Bowie, Leif Eckstrom, and Britt Rusert's essay, "Visionary History: Recovering William J. Wilson's 'Afric-American Picture Gallery,'" begins the next section and its inquiry into the relation of expected and unexpected formats in African American print. One of the most engaging, confounding, and revealing achievements in African American literary history remains buried in the pages of the *Anglo-African Magazine*, a publication that is in many ways the high point of African American print culture history prior to the Civil War. While scholars have in recent years mined the *Anglo-African* for a series of foundational texts of early African American literary publication, from Martin Delany's serial novel *Blake: or, the Huts of America* to Frances Harper's short story "The Two Offers," William J. Wilson's "Afric-American Picture Gallery" has been waiting for its moment in the spotlight. Wilson, a black educator, activist, and Brooklynite, was passionate about the glaring lack of positive images of African Americans circulating in the antebellum public sphere (as well as in black counterpublics). His "Afric-American Picture Gallery," a seven-part series of fictional sketches published in the *Anglo-African* in 1859, sought to redress that visual absence and to encourage future production of

black images by black people by imagining a gallery of African American art, a gallery wrought in textual form. Building on John Ernest and Ivy Wilson's foundational scholarship on the "Picture Gallery," this essay contributes to an emerging critical conversation around Wilson and his text by exploring three possible routes for future scholarship on the series: Wilson's theorizations of a diachronic "Afric-American" reading public, an emancipated spectator as experimental seeker, and the role of fantasy in the series in apprehending a future-oriented black politics. While the essay's authors are invested in making the "Picture Gallery" available and accessible to twenty-first-century scholars, the essay also meditates on the "Picture Gallery's" own challenge to the origin stories that are often reproduced in contemporary recovery work around early African American texts through Wilson's profound reflection on the dynamic diachronic temporalities that defined early black print culture.

In the next chapter, Aria S. Halliday explores the gendering of periodicals and periodical culture. "Centering Black Women in the Black Chicago Renaissance: Katherine Williams-Irvin, Olive Diggs, and 'New Negro Womanhood'" departs from previous masculinist scholarship on the New Negro in the Black Chicago Renaissance that followed Alain Locke's proposition to black men to modernize themselves through urbanization. While black women's participation in modernity had been relegated to women's clubs, community organizations, and the desire to uplift their communities through activism and respectability, Halliday shows how black women also participated in the black press, proliferating ideas of progress, modernity, and respectability. Analyzing recovered issues of the Sunday *Chicago Bee* published from 1925 to 1942, Halliday traces the involvement of two important yet forgotten black women in Chicago's black press: Katherine Williams-Irvin and Olive Diggs. Although black men like the two women's boss, Anthony Overton, gained notoriety and economic stability because of their entrepreneurial ventures, they were successful precisely because of black women's labor. In concert with their civic, sororal, and political organization affiliations, black women like Williams-Irvin and Diggs proliferated the ideals of modern black women as cultured producers and loyal consumers of the black press. These women generated and broadcast the concept of "New Negro womanhood," documenting strategies for black women to become modern citizens in the United States in the black press.

Michaël Roy's "The Slave Narrative Unbound" begins with the presumption that study of the antebellum slave narrative has long been associated with the study of bound books but moves on to show us how this common assumption leads us to overlook an entire archive of other possibilities. When we think of the narratives of Frederick Douglass, William Wells Brown, and Harriet

Jacobs, we think of the separately published volumes that these authors produced. Zeroing in on the bound book as the quintessential form of the slave narrative can be reductive, Roy argues. First, it detracts our attention from a number of texts that were published as flimsy pamphlets (e.g., *The Life and Sufferings of Leonard Black, a Fugitive from Slavery*) or piecemeal in newspapers (the 1838 "Recollections of Slavery by a Runaway Slave," which appeared in the *Advocate of Freedom,* among others). Second, it suggests that the book was the most efficient vehicle for the diffusion of African American letters in antebellum America, which was not always the case. Self-published narratives such as *The Life of John Thompson, a Fugitive Slave* did not circulate well in the absence of a publishing infrastructure that would have helped the dissemination of black books. In fact, the narratives that can be said to have been the most successful were precisely those that traveled outside the pages of bound books to be illustrated in panoramas, turned into song, or rewritten for children—narratives that crossed media and genres such as those of William and Ellen Craft and Henry Box Brown. By reframing the slave narrative as a discursive practice rather than a distinct literary genre with its own set of well-defined characteristics, we might not only open up the field of slave testimony to accommodate different kinds of differently told stories but also better appreciate what "the slave narrative" might have meant to antebellum Americans.

The final essay of the collection, Bryan Sinche's "The Walking Book," continues the line of questioning about the book and its formats by chronicling the print history of *The Light and the Truth of Slavery: Aaron's History* (1843–45). This book is one of many examples of what Sinche calls a supplicant text, that is, a publication that announces its author's need for economic support and is offered in exchange for that support. As a self-published, heavily plagiarized supplicant text that is only nominally concerned with slavery, *Aaron's History* directs us to adopt a broader vision of what a book might be, and Sinche argues that it prompts us to rethink the limits of African American authorship and entrepreneurship. Sinche explains the form and functions of the supplicant text and sketches a brief history of such publications before taking a close look at the physical and textual details of *Aaron's History*, which follows its author on a desultory path in search of physical sustenance and material support. Part of that search required the circulation of a manuscript edition of the book in process, and, in later months or years, it required the distribution of the various printed editions of the book. Sinche accounts for the function and effectiveness of all these textual forms and ventures some ideas about why Aaron's book might have been attractive to purchasers and why bookselling might have been attractive to him.

In conclusion, we turn to the epigraphs that frame our introduction to this collection. Presenting the award for Album of the Year at the 2015 Grammy Awards, Prince remarked, "Albums, remember those? Albums still matter. Albums, like books and black lives, still matter."[35] Here Prince linked the significance and endurance of African American life to forms and formats of music and print. To depart from print for just a moment, let us consider first Prince's other example: the album. The album as a form *matters* because it endures as a way of understanding the wholeness of a collection of music, of reading the logics of relation and juxtaposition within a long work. Albums also *matter* in a material sense because the properties and limits of their physical media are inextricable from how we understand and interpret them. The standardization of the twelve-inch, long-play, vinyl record spun at thirty-three and a third rotations per minute in the 1940s meant that recording artists could fill each side of a record with twenty minutes of music, roughly five pop songs per side. Our concepts of the single, the B side, and the deep cut are all reliant on the affordances of this technology and the cultures that arose around it.

The material form of the album has structured musical production and engagement, sometimes to the point of limitation. Behind albums are also the material processes of record production, the ownership of recording studios and record labels, and the musical distribution of record stores, radio station playlists, and DJ sets and mixes, none of which can be divorced from cultures of racism in our US context. Black artists innovated how we heard the physical forms of the record and the turntable in the creation of hip hop. The form of the record allowed for both the long play and the sample. The infrastructure of the record remained the same, but new sounds and new communities could be made by extending the boundaries of what others thought possible from the turntable and stylus. Eight-track and cassette tapes, compact discs, and MP3s dramatically changed the physical and infrastructural boundaries of the album, allowing and disallowing different creative, appreciative, and interpretive engagements. The infrastructures of the album are perceptible in part because of the quick succession of its rapidly changing formats in the late twentieth century. But like the infrastructures of print that we have been discussing here, these infrastructures have both foreclosed and been extended by black expression.

In Prince's words we also hear a call not to relegate either the album or the book to the past but rather to understand the past's endurance into the present. Prince's mention of books is incidental and not further elaborated in his comments, presented not simply as a stipulated fact but one that requires reiteration in our historical circumstances, like the importance of black lives. Like the album, the book is not just an archaic technology bereft of meaning and usefulness in the twenty-first century. Language and its history matter here too: the roots of

the word "album" trace to the classical Latin word for whited tablets used for writing and, much later, blank books for collecting signatures and print clippings. The word "album" carries within it the idea that format and whiteness are closely entwined, that whiteness has come to be understood as infrastructural to writing and recording.[36]

Both the book and the album are meaningful more specifically with relation to black cultural expression. Above, we paired Prince's words with those of another black musician, Questlove, taken from the beginning of his memoir: "We're always already in the book. We've always already been in the book."[37] Discussing his own entry into the musical artist's memoir and the freight and freedom afforded by the customs of genre, the first chapter of *Mo' Meta Blues: The World According to Questlove* stages an internal dialogue in which the author contemplates departing from the conventions of the mode in which he is writing. He asks, "So what's this gonna be, Ahmir?"[38] Discussing the form chapters might take as well as their content, he comes to the question of why his story matters and why this particular hip-hop story requires the form of print that it takes. Our epigraph comes from the very end of this first chapter with a revelation that the story to be told has already been instantiated through its own contemplation in print. Much like the "still" of Prince's statement about mattering, the "always already" of Questlove's being in the book attends not only to the significance of the thing at hand (the album, the book) but also to its historical and enduring presence and meaning.

Against a Sharp White Background dwells in that intersection of black life and the forms—both technological and social—through which it is expressed in print. The work herein explores how black artists and thinkers work in and beyond the spoken and unspoken norms of print and also how antiblack racism has shaped and confined those possibilities. Reading Prince's pairing of the continued "mattering" of books and black lives and Questlove's continuing inhabitation of the book within the larger context of print's and race's infrastructures, we must also recognize that race is one of the technologies of the book and that blackness is inextricable from it. The essays collected here, then, begin to explore the many ways that black people have, in fact, "always already been in the book."

Notes

1. Rebecca Schoenkopf, "Black Man in Baton Rouge, Alton Sterling, Becomes Hashtag," *Wonkette*, July 6, 2016, accessed December 1, 2016, http://wonkette.com/603752/black-man-in-baton-rouge-alton-sterling-becomes-hashtag#s3ACrhSpdWKe2jCM.99.

2. ChampagnePapi [Aubrey Drake Graham; better known as Drake], Instagram post, July 6, 2016, https://www.instagram.com/p/BHim8QWjFTx/.

3. Claudia Rankine, *Citizen: An American Lyric* (Minneapolis, MN: Graywolf Press, 2014), 134.

4. Stacy Parker Le Melle, "A Hashtag, a Movement, a State of Mind: Black Artists on #BlackLivesMatter," *Offing*, October 17, 2016, https://theoffingmag.com/insight/a-hashtag-a-movement-a-state-of-mind/.

5. Roderick A. Ferguson, "Race," in *Keywords for American Cultural Studies*, 2nd ed., ed. Bruce Burgett and Glenn Hendler (New York: New York University Press, 2014), 207.

6. Zora Neale Hurston, "How It Feels to Be Colored Me," *World Tomorrow* 11 (May 1928): 215–16.

7. Christina Sharpe, *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016), 7.

8. On the reciprocal influences between Rankine and Ligon, see Jill Steinhauer, "Glenn Ligon and Claudia Rankine Talk Race at Art Basel Miami Beach," *Hyperallergic*, December 3, 2016, accessed January 9, 2018, https://hyperallergic.com/342717/glenn-ligon-and-claudia-rankine-talk-race-at-art-basel-miami-beach/.

9. Rankine, *Citizen*, 24.

10. Ibid., 25.

11. Ibid., 26.

12. Paul N. Edwards, "Infrastructure and Modernity: Force, Time, and Social Organization in the History of Sociotechnical Systems," in *Modernity and Technology*, ed. Thomas J. Misa, Philip Brey, and Andrew Feenberg (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2003), 185–86.

13. Ibid., 186.

14. "infrastructure, n." in *OED Online*, September 2016, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/95624?redirectedFrom=infrastructure, accessed June 20, 2016.

15. Edwards, "Infrastructure," 187.

16. Robert Darnton, "What Is the History of Books?," *Daedalus* 111, no. 3 (1982): 67.

17. Leon Jackson, "The Talking Book and the Talking Book Historian: African American Cultures of Print," *Book History* 13 (2010): 252. For a similar account of the whiteness of digital humanities, see Tara McPherson, "Why Are the Digital Humanities So White? or Thinking the Histories of Race and Computation," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 139–60.

18. See Frances Smith Foster, introduction and editor's note in *Minnie's Sacrifice, Sowing and Reaping, Trial and Triumph: Three Rediscovered Novels by Frances Ellen Watkins Harper*, ed. Frances Smith Foster (Boston: Beacon Press, 1994), xi–xliii; and Jean Fagan Yellin, "Written by Herself: Harriet Jacobs' Slave Narrative," *American Literature* 53, no. 3 (November 1981): 379–486.

19. Jackson, "Talking Book," 254.

20. Alan Liu, "Where Is Cultural Criticism in the Digital Humanities?," in *Debates in the Digital Humanities* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012), 490–510; Safiya Umoja Noble, *Algorithms of Oppression: How Search Engines Reinforce Racism* (New York: New York University Press, 2018).

21. Frances Smith Foster, "A Narrative of the Interesting Origins and (Somewhat) Surprising Developments of African-American Print Culture," *American Literary History* 17, no. 4 (Winter 2005): 716.

22. See, for example, collections such as Frances Smith Foster, *Love and Marriage in Early African America* (Hanover, NH: University Press of New England, 2008); and Richard Newman, Patrick Rael, and Phillip Lapsansky, *Pamphlets of Protest: An Anthology of Early African-American Protest Literature, 1790–1860* (New York: Routledge, 2001). See also work on early African American newspapers, such as Jacqueline Bacon, *Freedom's Journal: The First African American Newspaper* (Lanham, MD: Lexington Books, 2007); Eric Gardner, *Black Print Unbound: The Christian Recorder, African American Literature, and Periodical Culture* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2015); and Ivy Wilson, "The Brief and Wondrous Life of the Anglo-African Magazine; or, Antebellum African American Editorial Practice and Its Afterlives," in *Publishing Blackness: Textual Constructions of Race since 1850*, ed. George Hutchinson and John K. Young (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2013), 18–38.

23. Joycelyn Moody and Howard Rambsy II, "Guest Editors' Introduction: African American Print Cultures," *MELUS: Multi-Ethnic Literature of the United States* 40, no. 3 (Fall 2015): 3–5.

24. Hutchinson and Young, *Publishing Blackness*, 2.

25. P. Gabrielle Foreman, "A Riff, a Call, and a Response: Reframing the Problem That Led to Our Being Tokens in Ethnic and Gender Studies; or, Where Are We Going Anyway and with Whom Will We Travel?," *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 30, no. 2 (2013): 306–22; Nellie Y. McKay, "Naming the Problem That Led to the Question 'Who Shall Teach African American Literature?'; or, Are We Ready to Disband the Wheatley Court?," *PMLA* 113, no. 3 (1998): 359–69; Ann duCille, "The Occult of True Black Womanhood: Critical Demeanor and Black Feminist Studies," *Signs* 19, no. 3 (1994): 591–629.

26. Foreman, "A Riff," 307.

27. Ibid., 311.

28. Kimberly Blockett, "Do You Have Any Skin in the Game?," *Legacy: A Journal of American Women Writers* 31, no. 1 (2014): 63–65.

29. On racialized disciplines and racialized people in academic institutions, see Roderick Ferguson, *The Reorder of Things: The University and Its Pedagogies of Minority Difference* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012); and Sarah Ahmed, *On Being Included: Racism and Diversity in Institutional Life* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2012).

30. Frances Smith Foster, "Genealogies of Our Concerns, Early (African) American Print Culture, and Transcending Tough Times," *Early American Literature* 45, no. 2 (2010): 358.

31. Wayne A. Wiegand, "Introduction: Theoretical Foundations for Analyzing Print Culture as Agency and Practice in a Diverse America," in *Print Culture in a Diverse America*, ed. James P. Danky and Wayne A. Wiegand (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1998), 8.

32. Neither of us ever met Tony Robinson, but when he was killed in our neighborhood we recognized the value of his life and the significance of his death, both in terms of his individual humanity and within a larger landscape of anti-black police violence. He was the age of many of our undergraduate students, many of whom participated in the local protests following his killing. The fact that his black life mattered deeply has not been lost on us as we write this introduction. We mention him specifically both in the spirit of Rankine's and others' public and collective mourning of black lives and to acknowledge the local significance and stakes of black life and death that accompany our work at the University of Wisconsin–Madison and the publication of this volume by the University of Wisconsin Press.

33. Sterling Brown, *The Negro Caravan: Writings by American Negroes*, volume 2. (New York: Citadel Press, 1941), vii.

34. Frank B. Wilderson III, *Red, White, and Black: Cinema and the Structure of U.S. Antagonisms* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010), 340.

35. Prince Rogers Nelson, 57th Annual Grammy Awards, February 8, 2015.

36. "album, n.2," *OED Online*, April 2018, Oxford University Press, http://www.oed.com/view/Entry/4635?result=2&rskey=eoxYDG&, accessed April 18, 2018. For more on the overlapping discourses of racial whiteness and the whiteness of writing and recording substrates, see Jonathan Senchyne, "Bottles of Ink and Reams of Paper: *Clotel*, Racialization, and the Material Culture of Print," in *Early African American Print Culture*, ed. Lara L. Cohen and Jordan A. Stein (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2012), 140–58.

37. Ahmir "Questlove" Thompson and Ben Greenman, *Mo' Meta Blues: The World According to Questlove* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2013), 5.

38. Ibid., 1.