

AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE IN
TRANSITION, 1980–1990

African American Literature in Transition, 1980–1990 tracks Black expressive culture in the 1980s as novelists, poets, dramatists, filmmakers, and performers grappled with the contradictory legacies of the civil rights era, and the start of culture wars and policy machinations that would come to characterize the 1990s. The volume is necessarily interdisciplinary and critically promiscuous in its methodologies and objects of study as it reconsiders conventional temporal, spatial, and moral understandings of how African American letters emerged immediately after the movement James Baldwin describes as the “latest slave rebellion.” As such, the question of the state of America’s democratic project as refracted through the literature of the shaping presence of African Americans is one of the guiding concerns of this volume preoccupied with a moment in American literary history still burdened by the legacies of the 1960s, while imagining the contours of an African Americanist future in the new millennium.

D. QUENTIN MILLER is Professor of English at Suffolk University in Boston. He is the author, editor, or co-editor of fourteen books and more than thirty articles and book chapters. His recent scholarly books relevant to this project include *The Routledge Introduction to African American Literature* (2016), *American Literature in Transition 1980–1990* (2017), *Understanding John Edgar Wideman* (2018), and *James Baldwin in Context* (2019). Forthcoming projects include the textbooks *The Bedford Introduction to Literature* (13th edition) and *Literature to Go* (5th edition) and *The Routledge Introduction to the American Novel*.

RICH BLINT is Assistant Professor of Literature and Director of the Program in Race and Ethnicity at The New School. He is co-editor of the special issue of *African American Review*, and his upcoming books include *A Radical Interiority: James Baldwin and the Personified Self in Modern American Culture* and *Duppy Umbrella and Other Stories*. His writing has appeared in *African American Review*, *James Baldwin Review*, *Anthropology Now*, *The Believer*, *McSweeney’s*, *The Brooklyn Rail*, *sx visualities*, and *the A-Line: a journal of progressive thought*, where he serves as editor-at-large.

Cambridge University Press & Assessment

978-1-009-17934-8 — African American Literature in Transition, 1980–1990

Edited by D. Quentin Miller, Rich Blint

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AFRICAN AMERICAN LITERATURE IN TRANSITION

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Across 17 authoritative volumes and featuring over 200 of today's foremost literary critics and social historians, *African American Literature in Transition* offers a critical and comprehensive revisionary analysis of creative expression by people of African descent. Reading transtemporally from the origins of "African American literature" by the first peoples calling themselves "African Americans," this series foregrounds change, and examines pivotal moments, years, decades, and centuries in African American literature and culture. While collectively analyzing both far-reaching and flash-forward transitions within four centuries, the multi-volume series replaces conventional historical periodization in African American scholastic and literary anthologies with a framework that contextualizes shifts, changes, and transformations in African American literature, culture, politics, and history.

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Suffolk University

RICH BLINT

The New School



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CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Shaftesbury Road, Cambridge CB2 8EA, United Kingdom

One Liberty Plaza, 20th Floor, New York, NY 10006, USA

477 Williamstown Road, Port Melbourne, VIC 3207, Australia

314–321, 3rd Floor, Plot 3, Splendor Forum, Jasola District Centre,
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103 Penang Road, #05–06/07, Visioncrest Commercial, Singapore 238467

Cambridge University Press is part of Cambridge University Press & Assessment,
a department of the University of Cambridge.

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www.cambridge.org

Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9781009179348

DOI: 10.1017/9781009179355

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First published 2023

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library.

ISBN 978-1-009-17934-8 Hardback

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Notes on Contributors

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has appeared in a variety of publications, including on *Racialicious*, *Al Jazeera*, and *Vulture*, and in *Post-Soul Satire: Black Identity after Civil Rights*, *Humanities*, *Biography: An Interdisciplinary Quarterly*, *Pre/Text: A Journal of Rhetorical Theory*, *Journal of Science Fiction*, and *College Literature*. She has served as the Frank Sinatra Faculty Fellow for the Center for the Arts and Humanities working with W. Kamau Bell (2017–2018) and Taye Diggs (2018–2019). Her book *Laughing to Keep from Dying: African American Satire in the Twenty-First Century* was published in 2020 with University of Illinois Press as a part of the New Black Studies Series and was featured in *The New York Times* “New & Noteworthy” book review section.

SHAUNDRA MYERS is Assistant Professor of English at the University of Pittsburgh. Her work has appeared or is forthcoming in *American Literary History* and *South Atlantic Quarterly*. She is currently working on a book that traces how writers such as Toni Morrison, Octavia Butler, and Andrea Lee invented narrative forms that refuse the historical demand to apprehend and determine blackness.

ALAN NADEL, William T. Bryan Chair in American Literature and Culture at the University of Kentucky, is the author of *The Theatre of August Wilson* (2018) and the editor of *May All Your Fences Have Gates: Essays in the Drama of August Wilson* (1993) and of *August Wilson: Completing the Twentieth-Century Cycle* (2010). He is also the author of *Invisible Criticism: Ralph Ellison and the American Canon* (1991), *Containment Culture: American Narratives, Postmodernism, and the Atomic Age* (1995), *Flatlining on the Field of Dreams: Cultural Narratives in the Films of President Reagan's America* (1997), and *Television in Black and White America: Race and National Identity* (2005), as well as over 100 articles, reviews, and notes. His poetry has appeared in an array of prominent journals, including *Georgia Review*, *New England Review*, *Partisan Review*, *Paris Review*, *Sewanee Review*, and *Shenandoah*. He won the 1988 prize for the best essay in *Modern Fiction Studies*, the 1993 prize for the best essay in *PMLA*, and the 2018 *Sewanee Review* poetry prize.

ANGELIQUE NIXON is a Bahamas-born, Trinidad-based writer, artist, and scholar-activist. She is Lecturer and Graduate Studies Coordinator at the Institute for Gender and Development Studies at the University of the West Indies at St. Augustine. Her research and teaching areas include Caribbean and postcolonial studies, African diaspora literatures,

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KEVIN QUASHIE is Professor in the department of English at Brown University where he teaches Black cultural and literary studies. Primarily, he focuses on Black feminism, queer studies, and aesthetics, especially poetics. He is the author or editor of four books, most recently *The Sovereignty of Quiet: Beyond Resistance in Black Culture* (2012) and *Black Aliveness, or A Poetics of Being* (2021). Currently, he is thinking about a book on Black sentences and Black ideas.

JOSEPH G. SCHLOSS is an interdisciplinary scholar who studies Hip-Hop culture as part of a larger complex of expressive traditions of the African Diaspora, with a particular focus on the ways that communities use Hip-Hop to develop new perspectives on social, cultural, and political issues. A past recipient of the Society for Ethnomusicology's Charles Seeger Prize, he is the author of *Foundation: B-Boys, B-Girls and Hip-Hop Culture in New York* (2009) and *Making Beats: The Art of Sample-Based Hip-Hop* (2004/2014), which was awarded the International

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Preface

African American Literature in Transition

Joycelyn K. Moody, General Editor

When I accepted the invitation to act as Series Editor for African American Literature in Transition, Barack Obama had several months more to serve as President of the United States. The US was in a time of tremendous transition, we knew, but the extent of the impact of the coming election and its outcomes on the lives of African Americans, we had yet to learn. In the years since, dozens of today's foremost literary critics and social historians have traced across this authoritative multi-volume series revisionary analyses of creative expression by peoples of the African diaspora. Reading transtemporally, African American Literature in Transition foregrounds change, and examines pivotal moments and eras in African American history and historiography, literature and culture, art and ideology. The contributors explore four centuries of far-reaching as well as flash-forward transitions, to replace conventional literary periodization with a framework that contextualizes shifts, changes, and transformations affecting African American people.

Taken singly or together, the more than 200 chapters of the series provide not customary synopses of African American literature but unprecedented, detailed analyses – each expansive, in-depth, engaging. Every contributor finds their perfect pitch. Where contributors are musicians, then, to quote John Lovell, Jr.'s *Black Song: The Forge and the Flame*, “music raise[s] both performer and audience far above routine emotion; the elderly throw away their sticks and dance.”

The central aim of African American Literature in Transition is to reorient readers' expectations of the literary critical and appreciative experience. The series emphasizes the importance of reading intertextually, transhistorically, and interdisciplinarily. In this way, we foster readers' comprehension of ways in which legal cases such as the *Dred Scott* Decision and *Plessy v. Ferguson*, for example, were forecast in David Walker's 1829 *Appeal to the Colored Citizens of the World* and have reappeared in *Solitary: My Story of Transformation and Hope* by Albert

Woodfox (2019). Truly distinctive, African American Literature in Transition offers rich demonstrations of how to read Black creative expression as a sequence of shifting contexts and dynamic landscapes.

I offer sincere gratitude to Ray Ryan at Cambridge University Press for selecting me to spearhead this project, and to Cassander Smith for seeing it through with me. I am grateful to Edgar Mendez and Cambridge interns Caitlin Gallagher and Rebecca Rom-Frank. I appreciate the enthusiastic support of my family, friends, and colleagues over the years: especially Lorraine Martínez, Roxanne Donovan, Kimberly Blockett, Barbara Neely, Cynthia Lockett, Rhonda Gonzales, T. Jackie Cuevas, and Howard Ramsby II. Colleen J. McElroy and my uncles Charles and Glenn inspire me in ways they cannot imagine. My son and my parents influence everything I undertake. To the African American Literature in Transition volume editors and contributors: your dedication to tracing transitions with me made all the difference.