March 2020 and May 2020 presented defining moments in world history, as the former date marked the shutdown of a global power—the United States—precipitated by the onset of the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, and the latter provided irrefutable televisual evidence of the ongoing US history of anti-Black racism as the merciless killing of George Floyd was displayed for the world to see. US news media headlines, such as “Two Crises Convulse a Nation: A Pandemic and Police Violence” and “Pandemic Within a Pandemic,” boldly announced that the nation was in the midst of two colliding catastrophes, and scholars from several disciplines began to research these matters. This special issue’s inspiration emerged from this challenging milieu, and these two crises serve as its frame. At the same time, the issue engages how Black women’s literary studies engage with and speak to police and extrajudicial violence, health and well-being, and community transformations—matters further highlighted by the COVID-19 global crisis. Questions concerning the conditions that have ensured the disproportionate impact of the disease on Black lives—such as disparities in employment, healthcare, education, and housing—reside at the core of Black women’s literary and theoretical productions. More specifically, this collection of essays concentrates on how these issues intersect, overlap, and sometimes collide in the work of three renowned writers, Paule Marshall, Ntozake Shange, and Toni Morrison, which spans over fifty years and embraces Black precarity and resilience. In the aftermath of the passing of these three writers in August 2019 (Marshall and Morrison) and October 2018 (Shange), a collective reappraisal of their oeuvres is a timely and fitting tribute, as each of their bodies of work...
reveal that they long have engaged concerns about Black people’s encounters with systemic barriers that have laid the foundation for the current twinned crises of anti-Black violence and the disproportionate impact of COVID-19.

Approximately five months after Marshall’s homegoing (the most recent loss), COVID-19 arrived in the United States, violently destroying much in its midst, and the essays in this issue theorize about violence and illness in Marshall’s, Shange’s, and Morrison’s literary representations of Black populations. Today, Black lives continue to be disproportionately affected by COVID-19 and all of the social, economic, and political dis-ease the virus manufactures, even after the rollout of vaccines designed to temper its impacts. Alongside this new reality coexists the legacy of anti-Black racism that has not dissipated during the pandemic and that too often plays a role in police and extrajudicial killings of people of African descent. Employing both universal and culturally specific themes, the work of these writers—including their novels, short stories, plays, poetry, essays, lectures, and other nonfiction—remains significant as it connects to existing debates pertinent to people’s quality of life. Thus, we contend that these Black women wrote toward, and in the service of, a future to which they would not bear witness. As such, we explore the overarching question: how does the work of Marshall, Shange, and Morrison speak to contemporary affairs and concerns? Engagement with this question allows the essays here to pose new insights about their writing in particular and to expand the corpus of scholarship on Black women’s writing in general.

Scholars have anthologized and lauded these writers’ work for their sizable contributions to the fields of African American, American, and Caribbean literary studies, and Africana, women’s, and performance studies. Researchers also have considered postmodernism, postcolonialism, Marxism, psychoanalysis, critical race theory, and Black feminism to analyze their work. Intersectional analysis proves a mainstay among approaches to Black women’s writing; literary critics have retroactively applied its precepts to even the earliest published novel among these writers—Marshall’s *Brown Girl, Brownstones* (1959). With her debut novel, Marshall held open the door for subsequent generations of Black women writers to continue to choose confidently their subject matter, despite the disregard they may face by publishers, as she boldly centers the inner lives of Black female characters along with topics such as racism, poverty, immigration, and intra-racial relations.

Marshall was born in Brooklyn to Barbadian parents, and she is revered and claimed in African American and Caribbean literary circles. Her opposition to Black people’s oppression and her desire for harmonious relations between the people of the African diaspora is visible throughout her body of work, which includes *The Chosen Place, The Timeless People* (1969); *Praisesong for the Widow* (1983); *Daughters* (1991); *The Fisher King* (2000); and *Triangular Road: A Memoir* (2009), among others. Previous scholarship has explored a range of
topics in Marshall’s corpus, including cultural belief systems, spirituality, memory, racism, community, and language. We consider that Marshall employs such topics to assist readers in examining themselves and the world around them; she mentions a major aim of her work in an interview, stating that her “stories, in fact, have to do, essentially, with a search for empowerment, whether personal, social, or political” (Interview). The subjects that Marshall interrogates and the tools for introspection and empowerment that emanate from her work are what make her writing continually relevant for addressing long-standing and evolving predicaments that Black communities find themselves facing in the wake of COVID-19 and various forms of violence.

Similar to that of Marshall, Ntozake Shange’s body of work exposes relations of power and racial injustices, which allows it to speak so presciently to the crises of today. Often associated with the Black Arts Movement and most well-known for her radical and pioneering choreopoem *for colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf* (1975), Shange, born Paulette Williams, was an artist and social activist who championed women’s voices and defied boundaries meant to contain Black womanhood and Black women’s creative expression. Shange was versatile in terms of genre, penning plays, poetry, novels, children’s literature, and nonfiction while also highly regarding music and dance in her literary practice. Aside from being exposed to luminary figures such as Paul Robeson, Dizzy Gillespie, and W. E. B. Du Bois during her upbringing due to her parent’s social standing, Shange was affirmed during her young adult years for her passion to display heterogeneous Black realities through diverse modes of expression by various communities as they underwent awakenings in Black consciousness. Distinct from Marshall and Morrison, however, is the fact that Shange faced illness and health challenges—mentally and physically—throughout her lifetime, notably bipolar disorder, strokes, and chronic inflammatory demyelinating polyneuropathy (CIDP), which hindered her ability to type and write with a pen in her later years. While COVID-19 is new, living with pain, illness, and challenges to various types of health is not, and some of Shange’s work demonstrates this reality. The poem “a word is a miracle” in her final book of poetry *Wild Beauty: New and Selected Poems* (2017), for example, offers readers an opportunity to ultimately witness the poet’s triumph in being able to write physically despite encumbrances, as the poem begins with “a word is a miracle // just letters that somehow wind up // clumsy fingers / with meaning” (235). In essence, meaning is produced even in the face of agonizing labor. Academic publications on her work address a range of topics, including reproductive experiences, womanhood/ girlhood, domestic violence, food culture, and language, and highlight her various works, such as *Boogie Woogie Landscapes* (1979); *Sassafras, Cypress, and Indigo* (1982); *Liliane* (1994); and *Daddy Says* (2003). After Shange’s passing, her daughter Savannah Shange succinctly encapsulated the thrust of her mother’s creative career, stating that “She spoke for, and in fact embodied, the ongoing
struggle of black women and girls to live with dignity and respect in the context of systemic racism, sexism and oppression” (qtd. in Kennedy). Shange leaves for us a legacy of work that operates as a compass for how to triumphantly tread through sick violence and violent sickness.

Among the authors in this issue that confront systemic injustices against Black people irrespective of gender identity, Toni Morrison has garnered the most critical attention. This fact is not surprising given her popularity, her status as the first African American woman to win the Nobel Prize for Literature, and the endurance of her work in the US cultural imagination. Moreover, that Morrison submissions to this special issue outpaced those for Shange and Marshall underscores how much more critical work that engages these two latter figures remains to be done. Morrison published several novels by the time she won the Nobel Prize in 1993, and her work, like Shange’s, spans several genres—novels, plays, children’s literature, short fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and music. A broad range of topics, from racism to patriarchy to motherhood to intimate relationships to abuse to classism, are explored in her writing. *The Bluest Eye* (1970), “Recitatif” (1983), *Paradise* (1997), *Love* (2003), *Desdemona* (2012), and *God Help the Child* (2015), among many others, continue to provide fodder for literary analysis. Never bashful about her intended audience, Morrison is commonly quoted as saying, “I’m writing for black people . . . in the same way that Tolstoy was not writing for me, a 14-year-old coloured girl from Lorain, Ohio” (“Toni”). That audience, furthermore, extends beyond adults. She wrote several books for children with her son Slade Morrison, and this *MELUS* issue opens with attention to Morrison’s children’s literature, not only because this part of her corpus is less popular among literary criticism on her work but also because the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag first appeared due to the death of a Black teenager—Trayvon Martin—and the acquittal of his killer in 2013. Still, the deaths of Black men tend to generate the largest amount of media coverage, discussions, scholarship, and rallies. Black boys and girls, as Kimberlé Crenshaw and others have alerted us, are consistent casualties of anti-Black violence. Morrison, along with Marshall and Shange, were cognizant that even Black children are not treated equally in US society. Acknowledgment of the multiscale attack on Black childhood, the (in)ability to imagine freedom and autonomy for Black children in an anti-Black world, and the impacts of anti-Black violence on living Black children—materially, psychologically, and educationally—remains necessary. While critical discussion does not often focus on Black children, Black children’s inclusion in this larger discussion of disproportionate violence, especially during the time of COVID-19, is imperative, and the collective work of Morrison, Marshall, and Shange simultaneously addresses and captivates Black youth audiences.

Illuminating our guiding question, Morrison writes in her nonfiction text *The Origin of Others* (2017) about the harm that racism does to the human race, and
the global protests in the wake of George Floyd’s murder demonstrated that many people share the sentiment that racism harms. People donned masks at protests from cities across the United States that began as a result of Floyd’s murder on 25 May 2020, and shortly thereafter, protests began to take place in cities around the world—London, Rio de Janeiro, Rome, Madrid, Edinburgh, Brussels, Paris, Sydney, Melbourne, Frankfurt, Pretoria, Seoul, Tunis, Tokyo, Dublin, Toronto, and Hong Kong, among dozens of others. Darnella Frazier, a seventeen-year-old Black girl at the time, used her cellphone to film Floyd’s detainment and ultimately his death, which was caused by an officer kneeling on his neck after a convenience store employee called the police following Floyd’s alleged use of a counterfeit twenty-dollar bill. Similar to, but distinct from, the incident that precipitated the emergence of the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag, a Black youth was also at the crux of this tragedy. When Floyd’s killer was sentenced, in a rare occurrence, to twenty-two-and-a-half years in prison for murder and manslaughter charges, Floyd’s daughter, seven-year-old Gianna Floyd, gave a virtual impact statement at the sentencing. Black children who have experienced (and some who have directly witnessed) atrocious acts of violence against the adults in their lives are devastatingly impacted, yet hope for their futures must be maintained. Marshall, Morrison, and Shange wrote with posterity and their futures in mind. As Shange declares in an interview, “I write for young girls of color, for girls who don’t even exist yet” (“Back”). While their work complements scholarship on Black grief, they also deliver narratives of communal care and narratives that provoke readers to do the work of reimagining, rebounding, reemerging, and re-creating better lives for themselves and others. With subsequent waves of COVID-19 on the horizon, even with three vaccines and booster shots in use, more death is likely to come, but the words of these writers offer tools that better equip us to handle what comes our way. Just as COVID-19 and racism continue to circulate around the globe, so, too, does the influence of these Black women writers. This influence demonstrates not only the prominence of these writers in literary and cultural studies, and their inspiration to figures such as Edwidge Danticat, Shonda Rhimes, Lynn Nottage, Suzan-Lori Parks, Aleshea Harris, Terry McMillan, Ava Duvernay, Jamila Woods, and dream hampton, but also the power and resonance of their words in a future they do not physically inhabit.

Collectively, the essays in this special issue address the urgent needs of our contemporary moment with resounding insights from Marshall’s, Shange’s, and Morrison’s works. Through these authors’ works, we become cognizant that the twinned crises of the COVID-19 pandemic and unremitting racist violence are neither novel nor wholly unexpected but are the inexorable outcomes of ongoing inequities shaped by extensive US histories of dispossession, dehumanization, and commodification of Black, Indigenous, and brown populations. Indeed, each essay reflects in profound ways on our collective pasts that are not yet past—the afterlives of slavery, colonialism, and other forms of dispossession
that undergird the project of the Americas writ large, and the United States specifically.¹³ In the “wake” of these histories, Marshall, Shange, and Morrison offer blueprints for survival, resistance, and resilience—for undertaking “wake work”—for building community in the midst of terror, for self-valuation beyond the brutal calculus of slavery and colonialism, and for imagining worlds anew.¹⁴ Thus, the essays in this issue are thematically clustered to illuminate Marshall’s, Shange’s, and Morrison’s charges for us to grapple with inescapable, quotidian violence—racist, colonialist, state, gendered, anti-queer, medical, and interpersonal—and the ways that violence allied with state power structures Black people’s experiences in the African diaspora. The issue begins with essays that highlight myriad forms of resistance to violent oppression and forms of individual and communal resilience and care imagined and represented across these acclaimed authors’ oeuvres, while the latter four essays converge at the intersections between racism, medicalization, incarceration, and abuse.

Lauren M. Brown, in “‘It’s Not My Freedom or Free’: The Big Box and Toni Morrison’s Meditations on Violence, Justice, and Power,” elucidates how understandings of freedom and justice are impacted by the alliances between violence, power, and authority in the United States. Brown argues that Morrison’s children’s book *The Big Box* (1999) addresses salient issues “for young Black and brown readers” who are subjected to “anti-Black and anti-brown violence” and offers insights that resonate with the Movement for Black Lives, which itself was founded in the wake of, and continues to address, the precarity of Black children’s lives.¹⁵ In the midst of twinned pandemics that collude with death-dealing political systems to render the term *childhood* meaningless for many Black and brown youth, Morrison’s text asks that we consider how these subjects might resist the violent structural impediments that disempower them and imagine freedoms beyond the confines of *The Big Box*.

Pivoting toward a focus on anti-femme and anti-queer violence, La Donna L. Forsgren, in “Violence, Ritual, and Vogue: Black Queer Feminist Praxis in Motion,” places Ntozake Shange’s representations of “Black girlhood,” patriarchal violence, ritual, and care in conversation with contemporary practices that address pervasive forms of intracommunal violence. Juxtaposing Shange’s *for colored girls*, a voguing demonstration protesting anti-Black violence, and personal experiences, Forsgren theoretically echoes Shange and Patricia Hill Collins by using “Black queer feminist praxis” and autotheory to foreground both the “concerns of marginalized members of Black communities” and the necessity of heeding Black femmes’ experiential knowledges within Black liberation activism. Ritual, “dance[,] and all forms of expressive arts,” Forsgren insists, remain “essential to Black girls’ survival within their communities and in a society that does not recognize their humanity,” which are ideas that resonate with the Black Lives Matter Movement’s renewed emphasis on ritual and self-care.¹⁶
Amanda Ellis, in “Drowning out Karen in The Chosen Place, The Timeless People,” asks us to closely listen to how Marshall stages an echoing encounter with slavery and racist-colonialist practices in the novel. She argues that Marshall makes legible the underacknowledged role of white womanhood in maintaining ever-unfolding violent forms of inequity, anticipating what we have come to recognize in the twenty-first century as the “Karen” figure in her depiction of Harriet Amron. These women epitomize unearned privilege and incite violence against vulnerable Black communities and communities of color because, as Ellis contends, these women are “produced by overlapping histories of racist colonial capitalism” that empower them to act as agents of colonial violence while simultaneously denying their structural and personal complicity. Ellis asserts that Marshall models how to decenter and silence the Karen’s outsized historical force by foregrounding the power of Black feminist expression springing from a “unique alchemy of Afro-diasporic power rooted in a strong awareness of Black history” embodied by Merle Kibona.

Margarita M. Castromán Soto, in “The Unhurried Hermeneutics of Anti-Black Violence in Toni Morrison’s Paradise,” traces the novel’s representations of “the victims of misogynoir’s slow violence”—the Black women who suffer under the weight of accumulated maltreatment and injury that manifests over extended periods of time. Attending to these women, according to Castromán, allows us to apprehend the unseen and unredressed forms of harm that Rob Nixon names “attritional violence” (2), which appear most legibly in Paradise as gendered violence against the women of Ruby’s all-Black community. Juxtaposing the raid on the Convent undertaken by Ruby’s men with the botched raid that led to Breonna Taylor’s murder in 2020, Castromán theorizes about how Paradise’s call for readers to engage with the “temporality of anti-Black femicide” has been subordinated to concerns of place by marking a deathly paradigm that reechoes within the Louisville Police Department’s Place-Based Investigations Squad’s spatialization—one that ultimately led to Taylor’s death.

In “Reclaiming the Street in Toni Morrison’s Jazz,” Alexandra Smith contends that Morrison’s “literary representation of the street . . . offers a valuable lens” by which we may “make sense of our current moment.” Smith elaborates how Morrison imaginatively (re)spatializes the street in Jazz (1992) to foster creative methods for addressing injustices and how these methods materialize within contemporary protest movements aimed at the eradication of anti-Black violence. Connecting how protestors in St. Louis (2017), Seattle (2020), and Tulsa (2020) challenged anti-Black “state-sponsored violence” by laying claim to the streets and chanting “Whose streets? Our streets!” to Morrison’s framing of the public street as a site of contact and possibility, Smith contends that liberatory possibilities lie in “reclaiming the street” in ways that decenter whiteness such that “the multivocality of Blackness emerges and . . . creates and imagines alternate worlds.” Positing that Morrison disrupts white-supremacist logics that
render public thoroughfares as stages on which Black people’s criminality is assumed and their murders are imminent, Smith assesses contemporary (re)spatializations of US streets as actions undertaken in the interests of a future liberation.

Shifting from the street as a site of surveillance and discipline to internalized forms of self-surveillance rooted in anti-Black visual and narrative regimes, Nicole Morris Johnson, in “On Opacity: Toni Morrison’s and Paule Marshall’s Narrative Vision Therapy,” explores how Morrison’s and Marshall’s works offer interpretive paradigms for dissecting these regimes today and imagining modes for seeing Blackness otherwise.17 Bringing together Simone Browne’s and Edouard Glissant’s respective theorizations of “dark sousveillance” and “opacity,” Johnson forwards the novel construct “narrative vision therapy” as a literary hermeneutic deployed by both authors wherein narrative itself functions “as a healing device that realigns readers with their power to imagine and craft narratives that decenter anti-Blackness.” Johnson insists that Morrison’s and Marshall’s works offer critical tools for assessing restrictive visions of Blackness rooted in the dominant gaze that expand their imaginative visions in order to combat the material, visual, and discursive conditions of anti-Black violence—skills that she argues are necessary to maintain “healthy vision amid ongoing terror and mourning.”

These essays also chart the ways that Morrison imaginatively represents resistance to medical violence and rituals, forms, and spaces of healing beyond the confines of an anti-Black, eugenicist US medical establishment. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, medical disparities exacerbate negative health outcomes for populations who suffer under the weight of socially and politically constructed inequities. Patrick S. Allen, in “‘Nothing Made Them Change Their Minds about the Medical Industry’: Medical Abuse, Incarceration, and Healing in Toni Morrison’s Home,” proposes that Morrison’s depictions of “medical, police and other forms of violence” offer “insight into . . . healthcare inequities” that can help us better understand “historical and ongoing racial injustices in the entangled US medical and legal systems,” notably the forced sterilizations of incarcerated women in California’s Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and ICE Detention Centers. Reading Home (2012) as a text that assesses the pervasive forms of injury that define Black people’s experiences with US medical, legal, and military spaces and that provides conceptual space to consider how Black women embody a communally-oriented liberatory ethics of care, Allen illuminates the value of centering Black women’s literary production within medical humanities scholarship, anti-racist activism, and liberation imaginings.

In “The Diseased Body Politic of Early America in Toni Morrison’s A Mercy,” Srimayee Basu illuminates how a colonialist medicalization of race in the seventeenth-century Atlantic world shaped US national formation and constructed social inheritances of racialized mobility and disproportionate medical
vulnerability that now plague the nation in the midst of the COVID-19 crisis. Arguing that *A Mercy* (2008) offers a “methodological intervention” concerning how race and illness are historicized by highlighting that early American notions of disease were shaped by the social, economic, and ideological beliefs and practices that undergirded transatlantic slavery, Basu contends that Morrison’s novel helps us understand contemporary pandemics and national social responses to the novel coronavirus. Basu asserts that *A Mercy* opens a necessary narrative and social space wherein ailing people conceptualize and address their own conditions against objectifying medical discourses that simultaneously disguise systemic violence and silence their personal and communal experiential knowledges.

Shifting toward communal self-valuation and healing, Giselle Anatol, in “Getting to the Root of US Healthcare Injustices through Toni Morrison’s Root Workers,” traces representations of Hoodoo healers in *The Bluest Eye*, *Sula* (1973), and *Song of Solomon* (1977) to theorize how these figures address disparities in health, education, housing, and protection that limit Black people’s life chances. Emphasizing the syncretic belief systems that inform Hoodoo practices, Anatol highlights how practitioners in African Diasporic communities worked to fill medical needs for people who lack sufficient access to formal medical care. Amid the COVID-19 pandemic, Anatol asserts, various communities in the Caribbean turn to traditional herbal medicines to combat symptoms in the absence of vaccines, ventilators, and oxygen tanks for people infected with COVID-19. Like contemporary practitioners who broach the gaps in access to formal medical care, Anatol contends, Morrison’s “conjure women” make legible how healthcare disparities are linked to race, gender, and class and embody and offer “syncretic, vernacular healing practices that could potentially ease the health crises” that plague society today.

Anchoring the issue, Martha J. Cutter, in “When Black Lives Really Do Matter: Subverting Medical Racism through African-Diasporic Healing Rituals in Toni Morrison’s Fiction,” traces Morrison’s representations of “alternative modes of healing within a Black metacultural framework” that encompass practices and beliefs from multiple sites in the African diaspora. Cutter asserts that Morrison’s Black women healers develop novel healing practices by merging inherited and experiential knowledges in order to address illness and injury left unredressed by the dominant medical regime. Tracking ritual practices designed to reverse the social, psychic, and physical fragmentation experienced by Black people across the novels *Beloved* (1987), *Paradise*, and *Home*, Cutter contends that Morrison’s fiction offers prescient insight for Black communities facing issues of medical neglect during the COVID-19 pandemic—that they turn their focus inward, “toward coalitional healing” practices beyond “the white-dominant medical establishment” that refuses to honor and heal Black people. Turning once again toward forms of safety in guarded spaces where Black lives may truly matter, heal, and thrive is something to sincerely consider given
the ongoing crises of today that echo and extend the wake of terror. Ultimately, Marshall’s, Shange’s, and Morrison’s works speak to our current moment; we ought to listen to what they have to say. We might imagine Marshall, Shange, and Morrison collectively saying to the audiences of their work what an elder character says to a youngster in Marshall’s final novel, The Fisher King: “You got some of all of us in you, dontcha? . . . Better be somethin’ good” (36). Certainly, the mantle has been passed to a new generation, and it is our responsibility to heed these Black women writers’ foresight and engage in the visionary praxis they model—to reimagine our current circumstances and to work to create more just futures in our national and global communities.

Notes
1. For example, see Candice A. Pitts, Joanna Davis-McElligatt, and Supriya Nair.
2. Discussing her Random House publishing experience for Brown Girl, Brownstones (1959), Paule Marshall recalls a slight by the publisher who was “saying that even though his company was publishing it, he really didn’t consider it part of American letters or [her] as part of the literary establishment. There was that kind of disregard, certainly for black women writers” (“MELUS” 127).
3. A special 2017 issue of Anthurium: A Caribbean Studies Journal presents recent explorations of Marshall’s writing and features scholars such as Lia T. Bascomb, John Keene, Shirley D. Toland-Dix, and Jason Hendrickson. See Kelly Baker Josephs’s introduction to this issue.
4. For more on Ntozake Shange’s upbringing and exposure to Black culture, see Hilton Als.
5. For an interview with Shange on the impact of her health on her writing in her later years, see “Ntozake Shange on Writing Her Own Words in Her Own Way” (2017).
6. See Trimiko Melancon for the introduction to her guest-edited double issue on Shange that features recent scholarship on Shange’s body of work.
7. See the Toni Morrison Society for a list of the many publications on Morrison and her work. Additionally, College Literature published a 2020 special issue commemorating the fiftieth anniversary of Morrison’s The Bluest Eye (1970); see Rhaisa Williams and Stacie McCormick’s introduction to this issue.
8. For more on anti-Black violence toward Black women and girls, see Kimberlé Crenshaw et al.
9. For research revealing that Black children are six times more likely to be shot to death by police, see Gia M. Badolato et al. See also Rebecca Epstein et al. for information on the adultification of Black children.
10. Morrison critiques racism throughout The Origin of Others (2017).
11. For more on the sentencing of George Floyd’s murderer and his daughter’s statement that was played in court, see Amy Forliti and Steve Karnowski.

12. For a discussion on Black grief, the impacts of anti-Black violence on Black youth, coping mechanisms, and various modes of resistance and resilience in the context of the current iteration of Black freedom struggles, see Robin Brooks.

13. Saidiya Hartman coined the term *afterlife of slavery* in *Lose Your Mother: A Journey along the Atlantic Slave Route* (2007) to indicate the “skewed life chances, limited access to health and education, premature death, incarceration, and impoverishment” faced by African diasporic people due to their continued devaluation within “a racial calculus and a political arithmetic that were entrenched long ago” (6).

14. Christina Sharpe suggests an expansive understanding of the term *wake* as metaphor in the incisive *In the Wake: On Blackness and Being* (2016). The wake, as Sharpe theorizes it, encompasses “keeping watch with the dead, the path of a ship, a consequence of something, in the line of flight and/or sight, awakening, or consciousness” that, in tandem with “wake work,” presents “an analytic” that extends the line of possibilities for imagining “new ways to live in the wake of slavery, in slavery’s afterlives, to survive (and more) the afterlife of property” (17–18).

15. Movement for Black Lives co-founder Alicia Garza first used the phrase “Black Lives Matter” in a Facebook post in July 2013 to express the collective grief and disappointment felt within Black communities due to the acquittal of George Zimmerman. Garza’s words were later economized in hashtag form by fellow co-founder Patrice Cullors. See Jelani Cobb and Monica Anderson. The phrases “Movement for Black Lives” and “Black Lives Matter Movement” are used interchangeably in this introduction.

16. See Patricia Hill Collins’s *Black Sexual Politics: African Americans, Gender, and the New Racism* (2004) for a detailed discussion of how race, gender, sexuality, and class intersect to impact diverse members of Black communities differently, and how various avenues of creative self-expression may help to illuminate and countermand these differential effects of racist, sexist, and homophobic prejudices and violence in order to decenter Eurocentric conceptions of masculinity, femininity, and personhood. For an extended discussion of Collins’s interventions and the ways that Black Feminism has been co-opted by the academy, see Jennifer Nash. For a discussion of the academy as a site of surveillance for Black feminist scholars, see Brittney Cooper. For a discussion of Collins’s valuation of experiential knowledge in the production of Black feminist theory and “egalitarian citational practices,” see Meina Yates-Richard.

17. The use of the term *otherwise* here aligns with Sharpe’s theorizations in *In the Wake*, wherein Sharpe conceptualizes the “otherwise” as “the excess of what
is caught in the frame . . . something beyond a visuality that is, as Nicholas Mirzoeff (2011) argues, subordinated by the logics of the administered plantation” (117).

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