

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I've said this before, but I don't really like writing these acknowledgments. It feels disingenuous; it's hard to chop up, discretely, the people who have helped me in this book process. Because, to be sure, everyone has, people whose names I don't even know. Not to say that I'm in touch or in tune with all the beings of the universe, only to say that my interactions with cashiers at grocery stores and movie theaters impact me in ways that have, perhaps inevitably, seeped into this book. But I'll just write the acknowledgments and that'll be that.

This book arose out of an attempt to understand my frustration with a phrase with which I ultimately, save for a few nuances I'd make, agree. That phrase, "Black people can't be cisgender," often appended with an exclamation point and nearly always with a capital "B," frustrated me because I need more. I needed them to say how, why, what the implications were, where it came from. I could not simply snap my fingers or nod my head to its articulation, for there was something, I suspected,

missing. So, this book is a compilation of the things I felt were missing, the hows and whys and implications and whences.

I could not have written this without the numerous conversations I've had with friends and colleagues and loved ones. I thank, in no particular order:

Susan Stryker, editor of this series, who first spoke with me at the American Studies Association's annual conference back in 2019. I remember walking up to you, Susan, after the panel discussion on the impact of "My Words to Victor Frankenstein." I remember you being so humble, but, like, actually humble, not fake humble. After the panel, I walked up to you and we hugged, a long hug that felt so loving and genuine. You invited me to talk after a meeting you were scheduled to have—a meeting, it turned out, with Duke University Press about the series in which this book is published—and we chatted for an hour about so many things. I was so thankful to converse with you, and you held me in that conversation so lovingly. This book is possible because of that holding.

And Jules Gill-Peterson, one of the not-so-anonymous reviewers of this book. It was you, Jules, I sat next to during the panel for Susan. And the day before I was on a panel with you, and you radiated in your awesomeness. (And Kadji too.) You were apologetic in the email you sent to me, after you got the go-ahead from Duke to reveal yourself as one of the reviewers, because you had never responded to my postconference email and the resources I sent you. But you didn't have to be; those conferences, especially for introverted people like us, I gather, are exhausting. But I loved the note you shared. I told my partner about it, about how loved and, to use our word for the linguistically uncapturable feeling of love, "squishy" your note made me feel. I was cared for in your response, and believe me, you grace this writing. I try to channel your spirit sometimes, a spirit of intellectual deftness and precision, like you demonstrated on that other panel we were on together—for Stanford's Gender Institute—on the TERF industrial complex, with grace. My conversations

in your presence have been so crucial, you don't even know. I came to a kind of courage by way of yours. So, thank you.

I wish also to thank my partner, Sarah, for the numerous conversations we've had about so many things in this book. I sifted through thoughts with you, and you've been nothing short of the most committed thinking partner I could ask for. And not only that, all the other kinds of labor and assistance we cultivate together are foundational for this book as well. I would not have finished it or written it like I did if there were not someone to put away the dishes or, indeed, someone for whom and with whom I could put away the dishes, someone creating a space of comfort and life alongside me. That we share our spaces, physical and intellectual, means that there is a cocreation of the conditions for sustainable life that indelibly affect me. You are critical to that process, and that process is critical for the things that I do. And I hope to continue cultivating that kind of space for you as well.

There are so many other people and things and ideas I could name, and that I should name. I could and should name Jess and Danny, for the former has been engaging with me on thoughts concerning blackness and gender for the longest, and the latter is someone with whom I have felt the most genuine expression of family and kinship and who is quite literally in this book. I could and should name Treva, whose work and conversations over the phone have gifted me invaluable insights on what blackness does and how to live gender. I could and should thank "L" for the conversation we had that took the thoughts herein and propelled them into my life and writing. There are so many others, but to attempt to name them might be beside the point. So I wish only to say, to all of you, and you may or may not know who you are: thank you.