

THANK | YOU; OR, ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Writing *Stay Black and Die: On Melancholy and Genius* has been revelatory, namely the realizations, among others, that I have not only been melancholy for most of my life—how obvious!—but I have also been in some state of mourning over the last twelve years, in particular a series of losses almost every Spring during that period. Such confessions are not how I roll, let alone in a space like this where I have no control over who and how many people will read that admission. However, I want to begin these acknowledgments by thanking whomever or whatever has guided me thus far on the journey to now; and to say, albeit peculiarly, that I am proud of me for somehow waking up every morning over this long *durée* and working through catastrophe. That said, by acknowledging my melancholy and mourning, I take responsibility for bringing about those feelings in others. For those named and unnamed here, I apologize.

Beginning in Connecticut seems appropriate since that is where my love of learning commenced. There are so many memories, and so many people who are no longer here whom I still see, as if sitting in my living room, and whom I still hear, as if laughter fills our silences. I remember most every classroom teacher from the Montessori School in Bridgeport, Connecticut to those from first through eighth grade at Washington Science-Tech Magnet

and Carrigan Middle Schools, but particularly Principal Delilah T. Gomes at Washington who regarded my intelligence seriously at five, and gave me a local platform to recite the “I Have a Dream” speech from memory at school, only to later do it for the chapter of *The Links* in Milford, Connecticut. That same oratory was first given regard by the West Haven Black Coalition, then led by Mrs. Carroll E. Brown, and landed my face on the cover of the Monday edition of *The Connecticut Post* when I was just tall enough to see over the kitchen counter. As a preachers’ kid, First Baptist Church in Milford and Shiloh Baptist Church in Bridgeport exposed me to the Power and the Personality. People like Aunt Ruby (and her wet kisses) and Mr. Barrington (who shook my hand and made it heavier); or Reverend and Mrs. Kenney (her macaroni and cheese) and Aunt Dot (her caretaking)—they, and more, were integral to my early upbringing. And while the transition from Carrigan to Choate Rosemary Hall involved its own growing edge, I know the years spent at “our school upon the hillside” set me on a trajectory that prepared me for a vast and troubling world, yet also afforded me immaterial wealth. I want to acknowledge Miss Connie Matthews for talking me off many a cliff; the late Mr. Konthath Menon for telling me I had the potential but needed to apply myself; and Mr. Reginald Bradford and Mrs. Eera Sharma for constantly encouraging me.

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and African American Studies Department, chaired by Thomas DeFrantz, or the Hurston-James Society, coordinated by Alisha Hines; or paper presentations for a Summer Institute and Fall Workshop at the University of North Carolina, Chapel Hill, spearheaded by Juliane Hammer and Cemil Aydin, early critiques of the work spurred it to completion. Likewise, gratitude to Alexander Weheliye who read a dissertation chapter as a noncommittee member and provided copious notes; and J. Kameron Carter who saw the germ of a book chapter as a seminar paper. Moreover, that very seminar paper was indebted to Fred Moten who let me free-write for a semester and met with me weekly, outside of class or office hours, to hash out my arguments. For two consecutive years while at Duke, I presented chapters from the book at MoPOP in Seattle so thanks to Charles Hughes and Antonia Randolph for the invitations. To my Duke English cohort, here's to making a way out of no way. To my Duke professors and people, many of whom also glimpsed early gestures to *Stay Black and Die* or let my work be all over the place but still saw something there or kept me fed or employed, especially during the summers, or showed up on my behalf or said a kind word—Kathy Psomiades, Robyn Wiegman, Karla Holloway, Ranjana Khanna, Wahneema Lubiano, Ian Baucom, Rey Chow, Antonio Viego, Paula McClain, Jasmine Nichole Cobb, Karen Jean Hunt, Michaeline Crichlow, Patrick Douthit, Thavolia Glymph, Kerry Haynie, Charmaine Royal, Stephen Smith—and to staff who made sure my paperwork was right and every check arrived—Maryscot Mullins, Tyra Dixon, Kenya Harris, Doris Cross—thank you. To my dissertation committee: Tsitsi Jaji, thank you for chairing the dissertation and modeling for me that the music and the theory were never separate and worthy of me performing them out loud, as well as saving me from precarity through a phone call; Maurice Wallace, thank you for advocating for me when I was made invisible and preparing the way in your absence; Priscilla Wald, thank you for watching me and inviting me to be suspicious of my own words; and Nathaniel Mackey, thank you for listening to me and convincing me that the prose and the poetry were equally deserving of my attention, and that I could be a gumshoe.

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