

# Introduction

## From Blues to Beyoncé, An Introduction

Black women use the whole of Hip-Hop culture to not only assert agency, claim voice, grapple with and create images, negotiate sexual and body politics, evoke Black feminism, continue lineages, and empower themselves, but also lay claim to the public sphere and subvert stereotypes and domination by bringing wreck.

—Gwendolyn Pough (86)

My husband gave me a vinyl copy of Beyoncé’s *Lemonade* for my first birthday we spent together as a couple. Inside the album cover is a large photo book filled with still images from Beyoncé’s visual album. The central image in its liner notes is a black-and-white photo of Black women and girls holding hands encircling a large, outdoor picnic table placed under the cover of oak trees draped in Spanish moss. Half of them have their backs turned to the camera; many of them have their heads lowered, but I can see some of their faces. One woman seems contemplative while Beyoncé’s smile is captured. All are dressed in various white garments from different centuries adorned with various period-specific accoutrements. This single panoramic image (placed near the end of the booklet) spans two full sheets while most other title images occupy one page. Only two words are embossed on these pages, centered and at the bottom: “Hope” and “Freedom.” Sure, one of these words represents a song title from the album, but “Hope,” written in a slanted, almost cursive font, isn’t listed on the discography. These two words symbolize much more. They represent two of the most urgent and long-standing goals we aim toward.

Sometimes we name it (i.e., “freedom”) and other times we don’t; we feel it instead (i.e., hope). Either way, both words work in tandem and move us both individually and collectively across time and space. This opening image, along with the quote from Gwendolyn Pough, sets the tone for this work, for my work, and for the work that so many of us Black feminists, Black women, and Black girls do daily.

The Black women (and girls) gathered here represent the diversity and richness of Blackness; they represent the ongoing attempts at survival, liberation, and health. The image and the words resonate with and in the foregrounded sound, movement, emotion, reflection, intellect, creativity, and action produced by Black women music artists/writers/actors/activists/mentors/collaborators/daughters/aunts/mothers/friends/neighbors. The fact that we come from all walks of life doesn’t dampen our ability to connect with each other. Blackness is not monolithic. Because our histories are so robust, so old, so ingenious, and so varied, we are bound to have created a plethora of strategies to help us navigate and interrupt so many ongoing antiBlack acts. As such, there is no one “right” way to challenge oppression; we, in fact, have many tactics for circumventing systemic inequities as well as individual microaggressions stemming from centuries of hatred, bigotry, and ignorance—not to mention certain kinds of world-building. Resistance from Black women (music artists), such as Ruth Brown’s testimony to Congress, Ida B. Wells’ anti-lynching campaign, and Cardi B’s attempted trademark, documents our ongoing efforts to disrupt insidious, oppressive attempts that try to “freeze” Blackness in and out of place. Their contributions, along with others named in this book, provide instructive blueprints for understanding how to use our everyday realities to survive and give insight into how to interpret the practical applications employed by Black women and girls across time and space.

By pointing to these Black women’s (music artists’) interferences, *From Blues to Beyoncé: A Century of Black Women’s Generational Sonic Rhetoric* ties together “Rhetoric and Composition, Literacy Studies, African American Studies, and other spaces beyond studies of Black women’s expressive and rhetorical lives,” as one reviewer mentioned, and demonstrates how deep and wide these antiBlack roots are. *From Blues to Beyoncé* prioritizes the responses that challenge the very logic and purpose of these problematic acts. Recognizing these varied counterattacks, which is still necessary in 2023, begins closing the gap between the “exceptional moments” and lifting the veil on disciplinary containment of injustices.

After all, antiBlackness is not just a problem that surfaced in writing studies, or sound studies more specifically, in the last five years; it has been here for eons and precedes disciplinary silos. Thus, this work embraces Black women's sonic rhetorical connections and tries to learn from our similarities and differences even though these exchanges form in some of the most intangible, mysterious, yet wholly present and perfectly concrete ways. I hope we can learn with each other even though (as others have said before) we are "shape-shifters" and "time-benders" (Adam Banks 2011), and even as we crisscross through various cultural moments and engage with generations of information.

Each generation puts pressure on the last to fix what they broke or (at the very least) acknowledge its culpability in creating the world we have today. Tenuous relationships between race, class, gender, sexuality, and many other factors influencing and reflecting identity are constantly put to the test when the old guard ushers in the new. However, we can learn from these momentary ideological clashes or exchanges when we are motivated to reflect on how we can move forward and how our actions are/have been altered by our interpretations of reality: what we believe in, what we are told, or what is heard in passing. Each generation can learn from the previous one; each generation can leave its mark on the world. *From Blues to Beyoncé* examines these exchanges when Black women and girls hold hands around the table, making connections within and between each other across time and space. I see Black women's use of music, sound, imagery, and voice as part of those generational rhetorical methodologies and generational conversations, facilitating pathways for intersecting, blurring, and cross-pollinating pedagogies as well as activism in, across, and between generations.

Generations of Black women and girls, like those identified by the image and within the quote, have cultivated identities, rhetorics, languages, and literacies to navigate similar acts of oppression with and without music. Generation, as defined by Cathy Sandeen's reading of Strauss and Howe, is "a cohort of people born within a particular period of time" who encompass a "generational interval" of "approximately 20 years in length. Twenty years represents the average length of time between birth and childbearing—or the beginning of the next generation" (12). This quantification may also align with one's productive years within a profession or discipline. This span of twenty years is flexible (give or take five years in either direction), and it is generally accepted as an elastic classificatory system for grouping individuals who share similar personality

characteristics and experiences; it is often grounded by traditional, Western notions of the human life span. While I accept Sandeen's bound period of twenty years as a kind of temporal marker, I do also want to nuance it by emphasizing the affiliation and shared experiences of cohorts across time by exposing the kinds of conversations Black women engage with across "generations" to unsettle such a neatly packaged unit. The cases used in the following chapters do not strictly adhere to or exemplify changes happening in Black communities every twenty to twenty-five years; rather, the examples used here reinforce the overlap, doubling back, and jumping ahead that happens when Black folks envision a more just future by holding the past accountable.

This work explores conversations from the 1850s through the 2020s, providing a through line of how sound can connect over a century of Black women's rhetorics and how sound can connect multiple generations. As new types of media surface and document society's "evolution," more and more possible venues open our analysis to assess the kinds of dialogues Black women have to pressure for change and progress as well as reflect on the communities that made change possible—much of which is symbolized in the chapter's opening image and quote. Black women are proficient at reading and interpreting culturally relevant timelines because we are often signified as the litmus test for change. Thus, our rhetorical methodologies do, indeed, hold the world accountable and try to fix what's been broken, not solely by blaming someone else but by healing, surviving, building together and acknowledging each other's agency. These strategies don't just happen overnight, and they don't always happen within the span of twenty to twenty-five years. Black women have been successful in thwarting continued moves of devaluation, in large part because we operate with the understandings of Sankofa and collectivity.

Black women's generational sonic rhetorics demonstrate the messy interconnectivity of rhetoric, identity, literacy, and context. Black women's rhetoric can limit the power of white supremacy; we can challenge the systematic erasure of Black bodies when we voice the existence of ourselves and our multiple (collective) identities namely by proclaiming and negotiating the spaces we inhabit. Black women's generational rhetorics are inherently radical because citizenship (in an American context, at least) has historically been limited, denied, or intended to erase the agency of Black folk altogether (Ore 2019; Sharpe 2016; Browne 2015; McKittrick 2006; Hartman 1997; Mills 1997). The traditional systems that cultivate a normative citizenship often (re)enforce oppressive policies hin-

dering the agency of people of color in systemic fashions. The use of these insidious, intersecting, oppressive systems like standard education, or a mythologized “standard English,” can have lasting psychological effects that damage perceptions of the self (DeGruy 2005) and propagate harmful stereotypes (Harris-Perry 2011). So the fact that we can recognize ourselves across generations is a testament to how long we’ve been here fighting for each other, asserting our rhetorical agency, and blurring generational boundaries.

This generational shift in scholarship, specifically Black women’s intentional intervention in these conversations, signals a pivotal turn in sound studies where Black women are changing the game—in usual fashion. Recent works from Daphne A. Brooks (2021), Emily Lordi (2020), and Regina Bradley (2017; 2021) draw attention to the dynamic and ongoing legacy of Black women’s sonic traditions, which have been often overlooked because their critiques don’t fit neatly into a box—or, to be honest, the old boys’ club did everything they could to keep us out. To say that I wrote this work to see myself within ongoing scholarly conversations would be cliché, but it would also be true. I began my initiation into sound studies/sonic rhetorics as I was trying to finish my dissertation (which was the original blueprint for this work). I was researching the blues and trying to connect language with music—not a particularly “new” endeavor in the academy—but that was when I was confronted with a group of sound studies scholars and hit in the face with the stark Whiteness of it all. Many conversations within these traditional acoustic dialogues stripped the music of the persons embedded within its texts or glossed over the importance of identity as an influential feature of sound, including the social, cultural, political, and historical baggage we all carry with us. When race and gender were engaged, Sun Ra and Miles Davis were the exemplary models to examine. Not to take away from these two essential figures, but what about the work Black women continue doing in these spaces and histories of sound? While I don’t dismiss the importance of Sun Ra (or more broadly iconic Black male musicians) within the subfield of sonic rhetoric, and not that I’m suggesting that these conversations weren’t helpful or necessary, I do think sound studies/sonic rhetorics still have a lot to grapple with, explore, and learn from Black women (broadly defined). So, yes, I did write this book to see myself in the conversation. I wrote myself into the larger sonic narratives, as Toni Morrison has suggested and as Pough, Brooks, Lordi, and Bradley have done before me. Like them, I write from a space as both a Black woman

scholar and fan girl of Black music. Vantage points like these offer the field (and subfield) something more accessible, more relatable, and just plain fun if you ask me—and that’s what may be missing from these static critiques of sound. Rather than a myopic view of composing, *From Blues to Beyoncé* offers an intimate, intersectional, and global perspective on the history of sound as applied through the lives of Black women. But even this work has its limitations.

For the purposes of this work, generational sonic rhetorics are mechanized concepts (i.e., “the sonic”) of *being* transmitted in and across sound (e.g., laughs, shrieks, or crescendos); they have an intentional and often long-lasting impact on one person or many people that energizes the translation of being across time, space, and media. Said another way, generational sonic rhetorics are the collective moments of sound that act as methods for communicating knowledge that can be used to persuade or inform (younger) generations about topics like survival, liberation, and care, for instance. Generational sonic rhetorics are the vernacular ways one learns about the stories that are passed on (to teach children life lessons); they are shared lessons and epistemologies about how to enact agency. These rhetorical practices are passed on by ancestors, picked up by individuals interacting with communities, or rediscovered in the future and reinvented with the advent of new technologies for storytelling and counternarratives. Embedded within Black women’s generational sonic rhetorics is the often-employed shifting—or the conscious change in positionality dependent on situation, place, and audience—as a way of survival or resistance.

Sound, in this project, refers to more discrete examples of communication, including nonverbal gestures—like moans, grunts, hums, rhythmic beat-making with various parts of the body—the speed, tempo, pitch, duration, and instrumentation accompanying voice (to name a few), all of which are audible to other people/listeners. In *Just Vibrations: The Purpose of Sounding Good*, William Cheng defines sounds as “things we say, music we make, noises we hear, pressures we feel” and suggests that sounds “are too often and too facilely conceived as just (*mere*) vibrations” (15). Moreover, sound, as it is discussed here, varies in tempo, pitch, vibration, frequency, and volume. It is constructed within dynamic ecologies and can be used as a rhetorical practice, making it a sonic kind of rhetoric. Sound, music, and voice are parts of a sonic rhetoric that serves as a foundational point of reference to better recognize when to listen for the rhetorical practices of race, gender, class, sexuality, ethnicity, and other

intersections of fluid identities for Black women that are engaged with day-to-day meaning-making. In other words, sound is to characteristics as sonic is to praxis.

As oral and written histories matter to rhetoric, so, too, do the sonic histories. They expand our understanding of communication and audience, challenge our awareness of distribution as a rhetorical function, and nuance our repertoire of literacies. I stretch these dialogues into a sonic third space by engaging with rhetoric that bridges the intersections of sound and performance, race and time, location and class with collaborative Black feminist praxes. I argue that the very use of sound, music, and voice as texts by Black women holds significance as a dynamic, rhetorical function operating within and outside Western notions of self, time, and linearity.

The interdisciplinarity and quotidian engagement with sound and the sonic, time and time again, lead me to ask, “How has (the absence of) sound in writing and rhetoric shaped Black women’s identities and communication?” When I suggest “the absence of sound,” I don’t mean silence, not entirely, because we know silence is also a part of Black women’s sonic rhetorics. What I am emphasizing here is the possibilities for theorizing types of sound as feeling, emotion, politic, or grammar especially when listening to, through, and with the body.

The sonic intersections of language and identity for Black women are especially important sites for conversation regardless of (in)formalities and disciplinary boundaries. Having spaces that engage in conversations of intersectional identities—even as they are formed through language, sound, image, and audience—are necessary for the growth and development of everyday folks, scholars, politicians, and knowledge-making disciplines more broadly. This engagement with the systems of *being* found in the everydayness of navigating one’s multiple selves is embedded within Black women’s generational sonic rhetorics and needs to be taken seriously. *From Blues to Beyoncé* focuses on Black women who use these variations of sound as vehicles for rhetorically distributing such generational teachings.

This work aims to challenge the normative literacy practices, the written and oral binaries, and the faux linearity of intellectual production actively working to excise particular bodies of knowledges, identities, and literacies. I bring those tensions, those years (and indeed those generations) of traumas, literacies, and knowledges with me, just as the opening image visualizes, into all spaces. The goal of this work is to continue

recognizing Black women's generational sonic rhetoric that pushes discursive boundaries toward greater intertextual, interdisciplinary, and communal inclusivity. Answering these challenges with an excavation of sound aligns with Eric Darnell Pritchard's solution for erasure, which is "Historical rootedness." This solution "is a key ingredient in one's identity construction, affirmation, and overall sense of self" (104). Recognizing, calling attention to, and listening to the rhetorics reverberating across time, regardless of the format of the "text," strengthens Pritchard's approach for rupturing the erasures mentioned here and elsewhere. Sound can help "rewrite" narratives, amplify identities, and reinforce marginalized literacies.

Thankfully more and more scholars continue recognizing the benefits of bringing in popular culture and music, like hip-hop, into educational spaces, bridging the gap between a standard curriculum that does little to welcome diversity and inclusion with students' lived experiences and epistemologies. Several authors have written about hip-hop's relationship with feminism and language ideologies and as a pedagogy (Akomi 2009; Alim and Smitherman 2012; Brown and Kwakye 2012; J. Chang 2005; Hill and Pretchaur 2013; Love 2012; Waters et al. 2019; McWhorter 2008; Morgan 2009; Pough 2004; Richardson 2006; Emdin 2010). These authors argue for hip-hop as a critically engaging teaching tool that can draw students into the classroom, creating spaces for active learning—particularly as it connects with students' ways of understanding their own being in the world. This can be said for all genres of Black music.

The emerging subdisciplines of sonic rhetoric, too, proves useful in aiding this bridge between identity and rhetoric as well as rupturing erasures of Black rhetorical agency. Taking up this area of conversation, I look to Samuel Perry's article examining "Strange Fruit" and Alexander Weheliye's *Habeus Viscus*—which focus on technologies, assemblages of violences, and Black feminist theories—to redirect the field's critiques of rhetoric, affect, sound, and ecology. Additionally, I rely on Gwendolyn Pough's (2005) rhetorical construction of "wrek" in relation to Brittney Cooper's (*Beyond Respectability* 2020) discussions of Black women's intellectual legacies as well as Angela Y. Davis's *Blues Legacies* to push against static critiques of class, consumer culture, and stereotyped personae for Black women in music. Their texts are foundational for many scholars, including myself, who explore intersectionality within public and sonic spheres. As the opening quote suggests, the *wrek* that Black women do and the intellectual labor they manifest claim agency and voice, document our



existence, extend Black feminist legacies, navigate respectability politics, and command recognition by empowering themselves and each other in public, private, and sonic spheres, which disrupts solipsism “by bringing wreck” (Pough 86).

From a methodological standpoint, *From Blues to Beyoncé* understands genres and discourses of Black music as parallel to this robust scholarly engagement with Black women’s rhetoric and intellectual histories. By mapping out the generational sonic rhetorics used by Black women, I reposition the way we read and use music, sound, and voice as rhetorical, educational models. This project bridges conversations of popular Black music, rhetoric, resistance, and Black feminist perspectives to extend and link agency, identity, and technologies with time and space. Furthermore, I address sonic rhetorics by bringing Black women’s voices together and blurring disciplinary boundaries. Such an attempt reflects the current calls to move beyond traditional approaches to scholarship and the “historical erasure” that Pritchard highlights.

This project uses archival material, auto/biographies, oral narratives and interviews, critical discourse analysis, and rhetorical analysis to discuss ways Black women use sound, music, and voice as interrelated systems of transmission, as vehicles for distributing social justice pedagogies across time and space. Hence, autoethnography (Heewon Chang 2008; Adams et al, 2014) and critical autoethnography (Borloryn and Orbe 2014) add to this research’s imperative by fostering dynamic understandings of transmission and rhetorical manipulation of voice as factors for interpreting sonorous methods of teaching, surviving, and liberating other Black women from psychological, spiritual, or physical abuse and/or oppression. More specifically, auto/ethnographic methods allow me to overtly emphasize intersectionality and identity politics’ fluidity, rhetoric, and performance to make my argument. Autoethnography does not privilege traditional research and texts such as canonized writings. Instead, autoethnography looks to the ways culture interacts with bodies (be that individual or communal) and allows for that knowledge manifested in those relationship to become *the* text, theory, audience, and critique. Tony E. Adams, Stacy Holman Jones, and Carolyn Ellis surmise that “[a]lthough most texts produce some kind of knowledge—every advertisement, movie, theater production, or novel offers a window into and insight about society—autoethnographers *intentionally* use personal experiences to create *nuanced, complex, and comprehensive* accounts of cultural norms, experiences, and practices” (32–33). As a method, autoethnography “take[s]

seriously the *epistemic* (claims to knowledge) and the *aesthetic* (practices of imaginative, creative, and artistic craft) characteristics. . . . [T]his means studying and practicing the methods and means for conducting *research*, as well as studying and practicing the mechanics and means for making *art* (e.g., poetry, fiction, performance, music, dance, painting, photography, film)” (Adams et al. 23). Additionally, autoethnography as a method allows the speaker/writer to use rhetoric as a means of “doing, sharing, and reading” their own embodied experiences, their own voice and visual representations of Blackness as cultural, personal texts that are (and can be) validated in public spheres (Chang 53). Thus, “autoethnography can also help transform researchers and readers (listeners) in the process,” (53) making these Black women (music artists) teachers, rhetoricians, and philosophers.

For rhetoric and composition scholars, the sonic is a subfield; it signifies an underused area of research that broadens the complicated notions of and relationship with voice, materiality, and spatiality in which to cultivate a context of meaning (Hawk 2018; Rickert 2013). For some scholars in Black studies (or gender and sexuality studies) where the body holds prominence, the sonic is a metaphysical third space communicating alternate histories and identities performed through vibrations and resonance (Stoever 2016; Eidsheim 2019). I would also suggest some rhetoric, composition, and/or communication scholars like Karma Chávez (2018) would find their work aligned with this school of thought because of the overt intersectional framing and emphasis on embodiment. And for some artists, the sonic acts as an affective method meant to invoke critical listening and thinking (Campt 2017) through one’s subjectivity. Here the sonic is a rhetoric that vibrates and resonates through listening and emotion. Sonic rhetoric is a way of reading the body, of reading materiality, and of reading reflections of identity across media through the many ways one interprets messages. It is a methodology that inhabits the in-betweenness of self-making and space-making be that on page, on stage, in the airwaves, or in the bedroom in front of the mirror as we twerk to Beyoncé’s “Sorry.” Sonic rhetoric is how our bodies digest and produce voice, volume, noise, and vibration as a means of communication, to say the least.

As such, I emphasize the intertextuality of Black women’s generational sonic rhetoric, both past and present, to continue giving language to my own lived experiences and the experiences of other Black women and girls. Through these sonic mechanizations, we can understand Black

women's sonic rhetoric as audible advice, or iterations of mentorship in sound, aimed at connecting and transmitting generational meaning, experiences, and lessons learned across time, space, and place. We can expand our understanding of Black women's contributions as rhetorical agents by discussing various ways Black women operationalize sound into action. We can recognize Black women's rhetorical innovation to retell our stories across media sounding out many methods for surviving, navigating, healing, and imagining ways forward.

The chapters presented here are intended to complicate the messy relationship of rhetoric, sound, and identity while simultaneously revising possibilities for understanding "the rhetor" as a multidimensional and holistic model. At the heart of this reimagining for rhetoric and composition are Black women: our narratives, our literacies, our rhetorics, our languages, and our technologies. As such, this work takes up Black women's rich history in the hopes of evoking more attention to the lineages left behind and still being produced today. Recovering Black feminist intellectual traditions like the ones unfolding within this book, surmises Patricia Hill Collins, calls for "[r]einterpreting existing works through new theoretical frameworks . . . . Reclaiming the Black feminist intellectual tradition also involves searching for its expression in alternative institutional locations and among women who are not commonly perceived as intellectuals" (14). She leaves the door open for a project like mine, suggesting that "[m]usicians, vocalists, poets, writers, and other artists constitute another group of Black women intellectuals who have aimed to interpret Black women's experiences." She adds, "Such women are typically thought of as nonintellectual and nonscholarly classifications that create a false dichotomy between scholarship and activism, between thinking and doing" (15–16). Suspending these socially constructed binaries offers possibilities for more critical examinations of Black women's contributions.

The first chapter, "Sonic Sharecropping," investigates the exploitative practices employed by recording labels. Interpreted as a vernacular, and often audible, space of knowledge-making, "sonic sharecropping" describes the limited professional mobility Black women music artists were often faced with. It parallels their experiences in the music industry with antiBlack practices of sharecropping, arguing these actions are similar to the post-emancipative exercise of legal economic "freedom" in the Jim Crow era. Through this concept, this chapter connects sharecropping's harmful, racist legacy to the continued exploitation of early Black women

recording artists in emerging genres of music like blues, rhythm and blues, and jazz. With recent cases of producers selling artists' music, like Scooter Braun and Taylor Swift, or artists' selling their rights to their own music, like Bob Dylan, the concept of "sonic sharecropping" can be seen not only as alive and well but also as evolving. Both Dylan and Braun/Swift profited from these exorbitant but "fair"<sup>2</sup> sale prices, while Black women music artists historically have rarely been fairly paid for their work. Grounded by professional and life writing, this chapter exposes the audible arm of lingering oppressive colonial tactics that historically have been used to control and/or manipulate people of color's economic conditions.

Chapter 2, "Strange Fruit Sonic Rhetorics," examines the evolution of Billie Holiday's rendition of "Strange Fruit" into a rhetorical discourse resisting antiBlackness and how it is later used by two contemporary Black women musicians, Melissa Elliot and Janelle Monáe Robinson. This chapter establishes how "Strange Fruit" becomes translated across generations from a visual image created by sound to a figure of speech. Using the vocalized imaging of strange fruit, that is, hanged Black bodies, I comment on the ways sound forms a means of resistance. More specifically, this chapter describes how the vocalized form of strange fruit changes over time and becomes symbolic of "the changing same" represented by the continued, repurposed iterations of strange fruit as a concept. This repetition suggests that we are not in a post-racial society, but that racism is very much alive.

Chapter 3, takes a closer look at sound, identity, and time by theorizing their intersections as part of a larger move to write the self and (re)claim agency at the sonic level. Said another way, this chapter explores how Black women music artists make space in their performances to assert themselves as agents, which, I argue, is done by taking time. This taking of time can be seen in the composing of sounds meant to stretch and hold the attention of the listener, making them likelier to remember the performance, the message, and the speaker. Using grammar, duration, repetition, and paralexical phenomena as techniques for altering time, I emphasize the ways Black women sonically counter demoralizing notions and stereotypes of Black womanhood. In pursuing this argument, this chapter identifies ways language can be used as a method of survival to the point at which Black women become visible as independent agents.

Chapter 4 puts forth the concept of "sonic mentorship," which examines a process of collective, sonorous knowledge-making production. More

specifically, this concept is centered on the audibility of advice—primarily the advice from older Black women (music artists)—as an important vernacular roadmap aiding (younger) generations’ navigation of space and reality over time. Using autobiographies and record albums as life writing, I argue that experiences that are translated into and from gossip and interludes are generationally operationalized by Black women as a means for making sense of the world. Ultimately this chapter aims to present Black women’s use of voice as a multigenerational and multimedia composing process for social justice pedagogies.

Finally, “Reverb,” the concluding chapter, takes a closer look at the repeating themes threaded through the work. Here, I theorize the impacts and potentialities of sound and the sonic as part of a Black feminist rhetorical tradition. In this way, I offer my final thoughts on a century of Black women’s meaning-making through and with sound.

This book recognizes Black women’s generational sonic rhetorics as an applicable, embodied portion of Black feminist and antiracist theory. Moreover, the threads of thought streaming through these chapters recognizes Black women’s generational sonic rhetoric as communicable care reinforcing our ability to survive and thrive—from ensuring Black support networks flourish beyond normative social expectations, to connecting and identifying the many ways antiBlackness systematically mutates, to building a resistive language springing from our temporality, to translating antiBlackness across time and media to answer back with Black feminist interpretations of hope. This book acts as the bridge between genres, between generations, and between discourses to (re)focus conversations of Black women’s rhetorical presence in sound. *From Blues to Beyoncé* sees the importance of connecting rhetorical models found in Black music, like the blues, to the rhetorical models found in self-writing to create a caring dialogue and vocabulary extending conversations and future research regarding rhetorical (sonic) agency. More broadly, *From Blues to Beyoncé* is a history of Black women’s sound.

Last, this book is intended as a kind of liner note accompanying Black women (music artists’) generational sonic rhetorics in the hopes of resonating with you on some personal level. What I’ve tried to communicate throughout these pages is the outstanding ability Black women (music artists) have to change our own realities—individually and communally. The Black women (music artists) invoked here demonstrate a small sample of what we’ve been able to do with and in sound. They

represent the numerous possibilities still to research and argue for our liberation, survival, and healing. Black women's generational sonic rhetorics surpasses such confining borders; their work is cumulative, collaborative, and innovative.