FEELS RIGHT

BLACK QUEER WOMEN AND THE POLITICS OF PARTYING IN CHICAGO

KEMI ADEYEMI

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DEDICATED
TO EVERYBODY
WHO GETS DOWN
ON THE DANCE FLOOR.

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PREFACE

People who don't work on nightlife love to comment that my research must be so *fun*, a comment that often doubles as a suggestion that nightlife research isn't really research at all. This suggestion often comes with the ancillary assumption that people who participate in queer nightlife are also not doing anything of interest or consequence—they're all just partying, just having a good time. Sure, going out at night can feel like an incredibly fun release from the doldrums of daily life. But this expectation that the queer night is simply about pleasure is often rooted in a fundamental misunderstanding of the many kinds of work that it takes to get to and on the dance floor. If you have ever gotten up to dance in front of people (or if you tried to get up and dance but couldn't bear to, or if you've gotten up and danced and felt shamed or ignored for doing so), then you know just how much physical and emotional work it takes. Dance is a very intimate practice of putting ourselves in relation to other people, often strangers. We build feeling by putting ourselves in proximity to other people, we make eye contact, we share gestures, we share touch, we share bodily fluids.

Everything that is empowering about dancing among other people requires an intentional practice of vulnerability and, moreover, optimism—and the vulnerability and optimism that are required to become in alignment with other people makes dancing that much more difficult and exhausting. You must think, hope, or assume that the party is going to be amazing and that you'll feel good; that you'll meet new sounds, movements, people, and, potentially, lovers. You have to trust everyone around you to work toward a shared goal of feeling good. The demands of vulnerability and optimism feel intensified for nightlife researchers who put their bodies on the line as a condition of doing their work, which can be hard for me as a person who

would generally rather that people not look at, talk to, or try to dance with me. My personal needs for the queer night had changed in my early and midthirties. I don't think I *needed* it in the way I had in my early twenties. Over the course of nearly a decade of working toward this book, I'd reached an age, which can be any age, when other modes of rest, relaxation, fun, and play simply felt better than those produced in the sociality of the bar or club: walks, daytime park hangs, dinner parties, watching TV, getting in bed at 9:00 p.m., and so on.

When I did go to parties, whether for work or play, everyone felt depressingly young; I would cross the threshold to the function and know immediately that I had aged out and that I couldn't (and maybe didn't want to) relate to the youth. Going out at night began to feel like a chore, yet I'd made going out a condition of my scholarly career. Going out had come to lose the spirit of spontaneity and, in turn, its charm, and this was shaping how I was approaching the party as a formal field site, as a place of work. Through my hundreds of hours dancing with black queer women, watching them dance with one another, and interviewing them about their experiences dancing, all I could see was that the hope for communal trust that the queer nightlife space depends upon almost always failed in some way; someone always fucks up the vibe somehow. As I lost my optimism about what the queer party could look and feel like, I withheld the very vulnerability that would require me to experience its expansive possibilities.

By the time I got to the E N E R G Y party, I was exhausted and not that much fun to party with. I had left Seattle for a summer research trip to Chicago in 2018, when I planned to collect final interviews with black queer women throughout the city and make final rounds at Slo 'Mo, Party Noire, and other parties and events I'd been visiting, thinking about, and writing about. I had been working on various permutations of this book for almost a decade at that point and I was tired of myself, tired of my project, and I was certainly very tired of being out at night. So I came to E N E R G Y, very late in my research process, with no intentions of taking it on as a field site. Doing so would extend my deadline for completion well over a year, and the process of conducting research would be difficult because the party is hosted every Sunday and I didn't live in Chicago anymore. These geographic and administrative restrictions made it so that I could go to E N E R G Y on any given Sunday without my "work hat" on, and I hadn't felt that way in ages.

I could show up exhausted from hot and humid Sundays of party hopping, or having convinced myself up and off the couch and into the night,

and be immediately welcomed in by the organizers, Tori and Jae, who circle the room making connections to and across attendees. I could settle in to one of the low lounge chairs or sit at the bar to feel quiet, still, and observant—until I'd regained the resources to be up and about, chatting and dancing. The party helped me escape the gentrified hell that was (is) Logan Square, where I often stayed on research trips, and it felt *so nice* to be around that many unapologetically black queer and lesbian people in the tight quarters of Tantrum, where the party was hosted. The party and the people within it were largely new to me, and the process of entering the space reminded me of all the feelings and energies and hard work that it took to build my queer nightlife community when I first arrived in Chicago in 2008. This many years later, when I thought (and continue to think) of myself as a nightlife curmudgeon, E N E R G Y simply felt *fun*.

For all the ways that E N E R G Y reminded me of the value of simply partying without expectation, the party was just too good to pass up and I decided to make it one of my field sites. I continued to travel to Chicago to attend E N E R G Y and interview its organizers and attendees, and to try to remain connected to the city, parties, and interlocutors that I had developed relationships with over the previous decade. With that came the physically, mentally, and administratively taxing elements of long-term research endeavors. The travel wore me down and strained my finances, but when I wasn't in Chicago or at E N E R G Y I agonized that I was a "bad" researcher who wasn't committed enough to my project. I fretted that I wasn't adequately organizing my life and responsibilities to prioritize my research. I worried about whether I was sufficiently maintaining ties in Chicago, stressed that I wasn't on the ground, tracking the minute changes that can transform a party, or a city, seemingly overnight.

These anxieties, and the already-existing exhaustion they intensified, continued even when I *was* in Chicago to conduct research. E N E R G Y opened me to entirely different groups of people than those who'd been circulating through the scenes that I was already embedded in. Each interview I scheduled felt undermined by my anxiety about all of the interviews I could have (should have??) been getting with the innumerable amount of black queer women at any given E N E R G Y party as well as people I saw on the train, who walked past in my neighborhood, who I swiped on Tinder, who I saw on my Instagram explore page, etc. etc. etc. etc. etc. I was coming across a wealth of new lives and new stories and felt a desire and urgency to do more and more, but I was nearing a decade of the various permutations of what would come to be this book and I had simply burned out.

The tedious, draining work of doing research on queer nightlife, let alone hosting or participating in queer nightlife events, shapes every inch of this book's interests in how, when, where, and why black queer women dance in Chicago. Black queer women of course get on the queer dance floor to have fun and to feel good. It is also an intensely political space where they enact rigorous, detailed theories about the relationships between movement and feeling in a city that is entirely draining and on dance floors that are seemingly always threatened by many kinds of violence. This violence is rarely enough to stop the dancing, though. *Feels Right* looks at the queer dance floor through routine and spectacular moments of distress and discomfort so that we might take black queer women seriously as complex beings who adroitly navigate bad feelings and disagreement, and who do so in the pursuit of complex black queer community. We watch, we judge, we desire, we throw shade, we take it out on one another, we scheme to see one another, we flirt, we grip up on one another, we daydream about one another—all in one continuum. We do this against all odds, as spaces for us dwindle, as life for us feels as perilous as ever. We find one another on the dance floor even if we don't acknowledge or talk to one another. We're all exhausted but we get on the dance floor because we love each other, in some way. We believe in one another that much, want to be around one another that much. We want more for one another *that much*.

"Community" does not simply appear by virtue of sharing a dance floor. Our returns to the queer dance floor evidence black queer community as a practice, inflected by continual failure, but where failure feels like an invitation to possibility—and where possibility drives us back to the dance floor time and again. Black queer community is not an end point but is felt in the experience of returning to the queer nightlife function time and again in order to see and be around people who look and feel like us and who look and feel like who and what we desire. Black queer community is felt in the shared orientation toward the possibility that we might soon feel right together. This book is written in the meantime, as we fuss and fight and struggle and strive. It is written with deep exhaustion and a heavy dose of pessimism but also with an uncommon (to me) optimism tethered to my need to feel right among people who can reflect myself back to me.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2013, I stepped outside of a crowded, high-end cocktail bar in Chicago's Logan Square neighborhood to take notes on the white twenty- and thirty-somethings who were dancing to the DJ's catalog of late 1990s and early 2000s rap, an era characterized by baggy jeans, oversized white T-shirts, and hard rhymes laced over melodic, danceable beats. The crowd practiced bright, playful dance styles remembered from middle and high school years listening to Big Tymers, Outkast, St. Lunatics, No Limit Records, and Swishahouse Records on Top 40 radio stations, the regional inflections of Houston, Atlanta, New Orleans, and other black cities having a massive impact on popular culture nationwide. The night's black entertainment was increasingly common in this gentrifying neighborhood that young, white, upwardly mobile people were flooding to for its low rents, solid housing stock, accessible public transportation, and growing service industry. I was in the midst of taking notes on how black aesthetics shape the physical and social choreographies of such white, gentrifying city space when the DJ suddenly rushed out onto the sidewalk, breathless and frenzied as he explained to me that he had been in the middle of his set when

> this black girl comes up on stage and starts scrolling through my iTunes and I'm like *Naaaaaw you can't do that* and she says, *All the music you're*

playing is about N-words and I'm the only N-word in here, and then she POURED her drink on the mixer and ruined it! The whole room just STOPPED.[1]

When This Black Girl poured her drink onto the mixer, the music shorted out and the crowd immediately stopped dancing, confused by the abrupt sonic shift in the space but also suddenly attuned to the fracas brewing on stage. Bar staff rushed to physically remove This Black Girl from the stage, and in my note-taking I had missed her as she ran past me and jumped into a taxi. An hour later the bar was still buzzing from the drama. Crowded around someone's cell phone, bar staff tracked This Black Girl's activity on Facebook, where she referred to the event in a post, writing . . . *so I poured my very expensive cocktail on their very expensive mixer and am headed back to the South Side*. With that, This Black Girl physically and digitally absconded to the South Side, a conglomeration of neighborhoods south of Chicago's downtown area with a historically large black population, where she would, presumably, not be followed and where she was, potentially, landing in a space where the sound of hip-hop is more racially and ethically engaged.[2] She deleted her profile half an hour later.

In taking the stage to announce that it was improper for a crowd of white people to listen and dance to music that she had an authority over (an assertion she boiled down to the complicated utterance of the word *nigger*), This Black Girl called for people to be accountable to where they were in their dancing bodies, in this neighborhood bar, and in the city of Chicago writ large. Her intervention pointed specifically to how taking pleasure in black aesthetics in that bar was only possible through a conditional proximity to blackness: that the multiple forms of spatial, financial, cultural, and social value white dancers gained from reveling in the all-consuming black aesthetics that night was only possible because of the presumed absence of live black people therein. Indeed, the blackness that aestheticizes the pleasure economies of the gentrifying neighborhoods like Logan Square is often produced in direct proportion to the forcible removal of actual black people from them.[3] This Black Girl's protest against using black aesthetics in a neighborhood with a historically small black population (<7 percent) was framed by the broader push to expel working-class black people from the region. Her protest threw into further relief how gentrification was steadily displacing white ethnic communities who had long called the neighborhood home and the Puerto Rican communities who moved there in the 1970s and '80s after they were priced out of the adjacent Wicker Park neighbor-

hood to the southeast.[4] Just under five miles southeast from Logan Square, the last of the Cabrini-Green Homes, a sixty-nine-year-old public housing complex home to a majority-black population, was demolished by 2011 to make way for an encroaching commercial corridor that is anchored by an Apple Store, an Apple-owned Chicago Transit Authority train station, as well as a Crate & Barrel *and* a CB2. The complex of seventy-eight low-lying rowhouses and massive towers was dogged by poverty, aggressive policing, and infrastructural decay and deterioration and was slated to be replaced by new, mixed-income housing that residents could apply to live in. As each building was razed, however, residents were given residential vouchers and dispersed to other areas of the city and suburbs. High-end condominiums were built across the street from the demolition site that was itself rather efficiently turned into a Target—no more housing, mixed- or low-income, has graced the lot.[5] The Julia C. Lathrop Homes public housing complex just east from Logan Square and north of the gentrified Wicker Park neighborhood faced similar circumstances. The units that long housed black, Puerto Rican, and immigrant families have been emptied through eviction and the complex has been redeveloped for mixed commercial use as well as market-rate and affordable housing—all on a property being developed to contain a river walk that will transform the landscape and raise property values. The changes in mixed- and low-income housing availability throughout the area have been further accompanied by shuttered social services like physical and mental health facilities, which have been replaced by ventures looking to take advantage of people's desires to buy food, drinks, and entertainment.

This Black Girl was not merely connecting the visible demographics of the room to the spatial politics of the broader city, though. She effected an entire, haptic reorganization of the space. She ruined the mechanics of sound production to halt all movement, disrupting the circulation of black aesthetics that were booming through the sound system and directly (re)shaping the physical and social choreographies of the white crowd. Her deeply performative critique was accompanied by a decrial of the literal cost of participating in this milieu (*. . . so I poured my very expensive cocktail on their very expensive mixer and am headed back to the South Side*). This Black Girl's active upheaval of the racialized network of music, movement, and feeling in Logan Square, and her subsequent flight to the presumed safety and reassurance of the South Side, mapped the raced and classed assumptions of how people move through certain kinds of city spaces. As she questioned not only *how* blackness moves us but *where*, she charted the

racialized spatialized parameters around who is presumed to feel good in the neoliberal city.

Feels Right is interested in moments such as this that reveal how race and feeling are entangled with the geography of the neoliberal city and strives to document black queer women's incisive interrogations of these entanglements. In the Chicago neighborhoods that this book focuses on, private investments meant to wrench ever more value out of land, housing stock, and commercial, retail, and service economies are rationalized as providing people more opportunities to live easy, happy, healthy lives in areas full of stable housing, safe drinking water, abundant food, access to public transportation or plenty of vehicle parking, and diverse entertainment options. The question, of course, is which people? The access to good feelings that supposedly comes from inhabiting and/or consuming such gentrifying terrain often obscures the devastating effects that neoliberal economic policies have on the city and the black and brown communities who occupy it. As This Black Girl made plain, nightlife scenes serve as intensely political grounds upon which the dynamics of feeling—and feeling good, in particular—are inextricable from the racialized spatiality of these gentrifying neighborhoods and Chicago more broadly. In each chapter of *Feels Right*, we see how black queer women's practices of inhabiting queer dance floors pose similarly trenchant theorizations and palpable reconfigurations of how the city's neoliberal governance is an explicitly racialized regime of territorializing feeling and feeling good.

The book follows black queer women dancing through Logan Square, Hyde Park, and the South Loop, neighborhoods where economic and cultural capital has been concentrated in zones of (speculative) profitability to give wealthier, and often whiter, people many opportunities to simply feel good. It focuses on black queer women's movements in the small number of queer dance parties in these neighborhoods: how they get on the dance floor, move alone and with one another, hype up one another, sing along to the music, dance in playful competition, and dance to flirt and hook up. The queer dance party is not always an entirely pleasurable affair, however. Black queer women make a myriad of decisions to stop dancing because they're tired, to dance differently because they're receiving unwanted attention, or to get off the dance floor altogether because it's just not *right*. Their capacities to experience pleasure in any given party, bar, or neighborhood are seemingly always grounded by the difficulties of forging black queer life in a city that severely (and often violently) restricts their physical and affective capacities.

Black queer women's deft navigations of the dance floor are thus demonstrations of how they (re)shape a party's people, music, movement, and feeling to suit their immediate needs. The dance floor also serves as a site where they (re)theorize, (re)organize, and (re)narrate their relationships to the systems of neoliberalism that shape and overdetermine their lives once the function is over. For example, chapter 1 explores how, at Slo 'Mo: Slow Jams for Homos and Their Fans, in Logan Square, black queer women wield the pleasures of slow dance movements to contest the logics of acceleration and accumulation that define the neighborhood and the city, framing slowness as a distinctly black queer method of taking pleasure in sites bent on the rapid removal of black queer life. Chapter 2 examines how black queer women negotiate the choreographies of Black Joy at Party Noire, in Hyde Park, as they come to believe the party's deployment of such a racialized affect capitulates to the middle-class blackness of the neighborhood's gentrifying downtown core—which is set distinctly apart from the negative affects that shape the black geographies that surround the neighborhood.

Feels Right refuses the urge to narrativize black queer (night)life as a utopian outlet from neoliberal rule. Dance is ultimately a critical language through which black queer women articulate their spatial, embodied, and affective stakes of occupying neoliberal city space, and it is also a tool with which they imagine and enact black queer community in its midst—and both processes can seem impossibly difficult, look ugly, and simply feel terrible. However interested in pleasure this book is, it cannot avoid how utterly draining it is to throw, DJ, and attend queer nightlife parties. That's why*Feels Right* is full of frustration and disaffection. It's meant to reflect how good feeling is only ever temporary, if it arrives at all, amid the myriad of buzzkills that shape the queer party, whether they be bad music, whiteness, arguments between attendees and organizers, corporate greed, neoliberal capitalism, or just bad vibes. The stories of black queer women in this book circle far beyond the realm of good feelings to offer important insights into other, seemingly minor, sensorial registers through which black queer life is experienced. They are stories about the tedious stressors of going out into the night; of the dullness and boredom that can pervade the dance floor; of the frustration, failed expectations, and frequent disillusionment that can surround the queer dance floor and the black queer community it can only ever temporarily consolidate. The potentially productive outcomes of thinking with these lessor affects of queer nightlife come to a head in chapter 3 on ENERGY: A Party for Women + Their Buddies, held in the overdeveloped South Loop neighborhood. There, I consider how the extraordinary

uneventfulness of ENERGY might help us take seriously other affective registers through which we might approach the doing (and the study) of black queer life in the neoliberal city. The burnout and exhaustion that circle the edges of each of this book's chapters—and that is perhaps the defining characteristic of life under neoliberalism, black, queer, and otherwise—comes full circle in the conclusion when the strain of using nightlife to build black queer community-building intensifies.

Feels Right continually complicates our hopes for and expectations that life at night, on the queer dance floor, or among black queer community simply "feels good." Of course, the goal of (queer) nightlife is largely to feel good and each chapter is ultimately organized around black queer women's efforts to secure good feelings at individual parties. Yet "feeling good" is seemingly always elusive in Chicago's queer nightlife spaces. I subsequently work to destabilize feeling good as a solid, achievable end point by holding it in tension with that much more difficult territory of feeling *right*: those hard-to-pin-down sensoria signaling that everything has clicked together. "Good" can be an unreliable shorthand because of the ways that it is subjective (one person's "good" night might look like hours of drunken debauchery to another). This is not to say that "right" is particularly objective. Indeed, "right" may certainly encompass "good"; the two flow in and out of each other. Something can feel right and also feel good, something that feels good can also feel right; something that feels right can feel far from good, something that feels good can feel far from right.

It is important to linger in the difficulty of defining and describing the messy lines between and across feeling "good" and "right" because black queer women themselves continually toggle between the two. People like Tracy narrate their relationships in and to queer nightlife, black queer community, and Chicago itself through the productively impossible matrix of feeling itself: a risky enterprise of agreeing that community or belonging has been registered not only because something feels good but because, when a constellation of effects sync up, it *feels right*. Tracy is in her thirties and has gone through several evolutions of partying within and beyond queer spaces. She finds herself aging into a new set of desires for her queer nightlife experiences and is especially interested in slower-tempo gatherings of smaller groups of people. As she explains what the composition of her ideal night might look like, she articulates the complex sensoria found throughout the book: "Everything is vibration," she explains. "The energy in a room, if it doesn't feel good, it doesn't feel good vibrationally. For me right now, if it's

not a vibrational match I don't do it." Here, Tracy connects the potential for good feeling to "vibration," which requires a kind of focus and intention to read and interpret. Assessing vibrations requires an acute sense of one's own body and energy, as well as those of the people and objects in proximity. The emphasis is not on the individual enterprise of feeling good but on the cohesion between a personal investment in one's feelings and the holistic environment that makes such feelings possible.

Following Tracy, the framework of feeling right offers a closer, kinesthetic look at the interlocking systems that situate us in our bodies, among other people, and within the built environments that structure our movements *and* our energies. This book mobilizes the language of feeling right in order to continually account for the relational paradigms in which feeling, writ large, is produced in the queer nightlife party. There, something feels right when your vibrations are gelling with the room, as Tracy explains. A moment feels right when your improvisatory dance movements are sequenced in a way that sets you on a sustainable flow. It happens when everyone on the dance floor syncs up in shared gestures, that rush of bliss when everything clicks together, and it can last for only a few moments or the span of a whole song or a multihour set. Something like *feels right* emerges when you feel linked up to the energy (good or bad) of another person, held close on the dance floor or spotted across the room, and you feel that wave of "this moment could only happen right now right here because of *this* party." Issa vibe.

The search for feeling right on the queer dance floor always overlaps with efforts to feel emplaced in Chicago, where access to feeling right and access to legal rights are entangled and circumscribed by neoliberal spatial politics that overdetermine where black queer people go and how they feel. The city delimits where black queer women can and should take place and continually and violently strips the affective complexity of black (queer) life in the city. Blackness is produced as a disembodied aesthetic to be pleasurably consumed or it is a fully enfleshed terror, a scourge of the landscape. In turn, black queer women understand complex feeling as a right in and of itself that they should be afforded in the city; feeling good, feeling right, and the right to simply feel become things that they seek to possess as demonstrations of their right to take place in Chicago. Every time the black queer women who populate this book go out dancing, then, they actively embody and theorize the relationships between feeling and rights to the city and, in turn, feeling as an intense terrain upon which the formations of black queer community in the neoliberal city have to be staged.

THE NEOLIBERAL CITY MAKES EVERYTHING HARD FOR BLACK QUEER WOMEN

Under neoliberalism, people, feeling, and landscapes are knitted together as the value of financial profit is bound to the accumulation of *certain kinds* of good feeling for *certain kinds* of people in *certain kinds* of places. Neoliberalism is a system of economic policies and political imperatives that solidified in the 1970s as governments and corporations colluded to produce an allegedly free market, which they did primarily through asset stripping, where publicly held goods and services are turned over to private corporations to own and operate.[6] Government oversight of institutions meant to serve the public good (such as public housing, education initiatives such as Head Start, free breakfast and lunch programs, healthcare programs such as Medicare and Medicaid, and job training programs) is scaled back and often contracted to private entities to manage, and government oversight of corporate industries is scaled back. Neoliberal economic policies that prioritize privatization often drastically reshape the social life of the city but also the physical landscape; zoning, taxation, and property laws that are meant to cultivate and protect people's abilities to secure resources for themselves give way to big business interests and multinational corporate investment. In Logan Square, where this book opened, the purchase and rental costs of the many two- to four-story buildings in the neighborhood have increased, pricing out longtime residents, at the same time that tax incentives reward private developers for building taller and taller, high-density buildings that stack increasingly wealthy people into expensive apartments sitting atop commercial space.

As neighborhoods and cities orient toward the kinds of private, corporate investment endeavors that traffic in economic profit—those that raise rents and property values, and encourage the influx of money laundered through service and creative industries—the use of service, arts, and cultural economies to produce "good" feelings also becomes good business. The chapters detailing the Slo 'Mo and Party Noire parties, for example, detail how private investments in the neighborhoods' housing and commercial stock in Logan Square and Hyde Park, respectively, have been accompanied by an influx of bars, restaurants, and retail that further transform the demographic and cultural milieu of the neighborhood. Developments aimed at incubating good feelings in the neoliberal city are often made possible only by removing

certain people to the margins of the city's zones of profitability, especially low-income people, immigrants, black and brown people, and people who rely upon government support for employment, housing, education, healthcare, and food.

Neil Smith posits that neoliberal policies, particularly those that gentrify neighborhoods, should be understood as an explicit revenge plot against minoritarian subjects.[7] What he describes as the "revanchist city" reacts "against the basic assumption of liberal urban policy—namely, that government bears some responsibility for ensuring a decent minimum level of daily life for everyone. That political assumption is now largely replaced by a vendetta against the most oppressed," criminalizing people and behaviors that are seen to undermine the status and stability of the white middle class and get in the way of profit-minded development.[8] In using terms like *revenge* and *vendetta* to describe how neoliberalism operates, Smith offers important reminders that economic processes are not passive whims of the market but are produced and maintained through the active collusion of policy-makers, city managers, corporations, developers, think tanks, the police, and academics. Martin Manalansan similarly argues that neoliberalism is not a natural, organic, or inevitable transformation of capital but is in fact the result of people who make decisions about the status and capacities of people, neighborhoods, and the broader landscape that contains them. He argues that we use the more specific term "neoliberal governance" in order to underscore how such an active (and violent) process of resource extraction and management operates by rendering some people and places as "unprofitable" and needing to be "cleaned up."[9] To this end, throughout this book I use "neoliberalism" to refer to systems of economic and political policies and I use "neoliberal governance" to point to the ways that these policies directly and indirectly shape how we see, think and feel about, and move through our surroundings.

The economic and political imperatives of neoliberalism's assault on the most oppressed is just an intensification of Chicago's long-standing practices of gluing black people to increasingly disinvested areas of the city.[10] In twentieth-century Chicago, black enclaves were razed almost overnight to make way for the cosmopolitan image of what would become the downtown commercial core, The Loop. Scrubbing seemingly unprofitable black life from the speculated profitability of The Loop resulted in black neighborhoods on the city's south and west sides, which were maintained through the legalized segregation of restrictive housing covenants that prevented black people from moving *out* of these neighborhoods.[11] Many of the two dozen

people interviewed for this book come from lower-, working-, and middle-class families who continue to live in these neighborhoods, including South Shore, Englewood, and Bronzeville. The racist aims and undertones of the revanchist city were evident across the United States throughout the 1950s to the 1990s as restrictive covenants that secured hundreds of years of state-sanctioned segregation were ignored, loosened, or struck down. In response to black people gaining slightly more choice in where to live, massive amounts of white people moved out of urban cores and into what would become the nation's first- and second-ring suburbs. This "white flight" was articulated through racist narratives that incoming black people were invading and wreaking havoc on white neighborhoods, ruining neighborhoods and driving down housing values. These narratives were enforced by an increasing, and increasingly violent, police presence in black neighborhoods; the defunding of social services, education, and job opportunities in black neighborhoods; and the construction and poor management of large and environmentally toxic public housing complexes that, all together, created a fine line between black life and death.[12] The collapse of the housing bubble beginning in 2007 and the related subprime mortgage crisis exacerbated ongoing struggles that black people faced in these neighborhoods, further indebting them or wiping out their abilities to stay out of debt, to keep their homes, and to transfer homes to family members in an effort to retain a modicum of generational wealth.[13] The rental markets within and beyond these neighborhoods remain fraught with unsafe housing structures, lead in the water, and absentee landlords and often have access only to subpar public school outlets, grocery stores, and public transportation options.

In light of this, for black queer women, questions of who gets to feel right in this difficult city are always entangled with questions of who gets to simply stay *alive* within its bounds. Throughout my time living in Chicago and researching and writing this book, the city's black communities dealt with brutal, unchecked police violence, undue surveillance by neighborhood associations, school closures, gun violence, and a fractured political system, just as the nation largely ignored the systematic murder of black and brown trans and gender nonconforming people nationwide—people's whose bodies and stories feel close to home for many of the people and communities discussed in this book. As LJ explains, "Any time I step out of this house, I'm going to be treated like I'm fucking invisible. Or I'm going to be hypervisible and it's going to be violent. . . . There's no way to describe black, queer existence without violence. And there's no way to define it without violence and displacement." For LJ, who has experienced houselessness, the violence of

displacement is literal and they also gesture toward the widespread precarity that can come with living black queer life more generally. Their reflections speak to the experiences of other black queers in this book who are navigating the challenges of living black queer lives. Some have incarcerated parents and others occasionally deal drugs to maintain a basic quality of life for themselves and family members who they are formally and informally responsible for. Several of the people in this book have experienced or are currently experiencing violently upended social worlds as the result of their coming out, often leaving familial homes, forcibly and otherwise, and living in the wake of such turmoil. Black queer women's lives can be deeply stressful as they contend with regular, ongoing, state-sanctioned violence while navigating overlapping recessions, transitioning between cities, houses, jobs, and post-secondary education to try to secure resources, often saddled by various forms of debt.

The queer dance floor is not an apolitical site in these conditions. Black queer women's continued insistence on traveling the city to come together in gentrifying milieus in order to move and feel in shared space undermines ongoing efforts to contain racial and sexual "minorities" to particular, and particularly enclosed, regions of the city. The dance floor is just one of the highly contested zones where black queer women directly implicate their bodies as they assert their physical rights within and over the neoliberal city.[14] This is no small feat, to be sure. As Jasmine explains, "It's so hard to find space in the world that is made for black people, specifically black women. More specifically, queer black women, even in a smaller sense. The spaces get more and more limited, the platforms get more and more limited, the opportunities and everything." There are in fact few public social spaces—bars, nightclubs, event spaces, and the like—that are explicitly dedicated to queer women, black or otherwise, in Chicago and the United States more broadly. Indeed, much of the extremely small body of literature concerning black queer women has highlighted the importance of private homes to the formation of community.[15] The historical barriers to building ownership that black LGBTQ people, in particular, face contribute to the ongoing absence of something we might describe as a "black queer women's bar" in Chicago. The diminishing number of bars serving queer and lesbian women nationwide amid the proliferation of bars serving gay men speaks volumes about the ways that women have been historically marginalized in the public sphere and about the ways that the figure of the lesbian is not linked to the kinds of financial profitability or political sustainability that has been attached to gay male subjects.[16]

The economic, physical, and affective domains of black LGBTQ life have long been targets for removal to make way for spaces of convergence that generate profit and good feeling for white, upwardly mobile, heterosexual populations.[17] This was especially evident in the 1980s and 1990s, when zoning, tax, and police enforcement shut down sex districts in order to build New York's Times Square. The piers were cleared in Boystown, Chicago; Key West, Florida; and Chelsea, New York. There was at the same time more surveillance in the parks, alleyways, and corners that people used for intimate cover, and it became ever more expensive to open and maintain privately owned bars serving LGBTQ people who had been displaced from those sites.[18] These crackdowns on the very juncture of sexuality, feeling, and place identify and criminalize queer modes of connection that are not properly profitable within the capitalist logic of reproduction.

As capitalism is wont to do, some aspects of gay and lesbian cultures are absorbed and lionized as demonstrations of "good" neoliberal governance, perhaps most evident in the consecration of "gayborhoods" that encourage people to consume housing, commercial, service, and entertainment resources under the literal and metaphorical banner of LGBTQ pride.[19] One gayborhood on the North Side of Chicago, Boystown, part of the Lakeview neighborhood, has played an outsized role in black queer women's imaginations of queer life in Chicago. The symbolism of a sanctioned neighborhood where LGBTQ people live, work, and play together plays an important role in black queer women's searches for sense of self and community in Chicago. But Boystown has never felt quite *right* to black queer women. Professorwrecks, a DJ in their twenties, gestures to the gulf between the image-ideal of Boystown and the material realities of circulating through its bar and nightclub scene:

> You grow up here as a queer kid and Boystown just is like the most visible space that people would see for anything gay. So that was just like, "I'm young, I'm in college, I can do whatever the hell I want. Let's move to Boystown!" without actually having that experience of, like, "What is it like to live in Boystown?"

For most black queer women in this book, the answer to the question is a resounding "horrible," colored by experiences of cis gay men's extreme inebriation and racism. Candace, in her late twenties, occasioned Boystown when she first moved to Chicago, often tagging along with an out, gay family member. As she found her own tribe in the city, though, she went less and less—especially as she became less and less interested in drinking. "When

you go to Boystown," Candace explains, "you get hammered, you know what I'm saying?" Tess, 22, is just one year into legally drinking and some parts of the Boystown scene are appealing to her because "you know you're gonna have fun." The drunkenness is, however, on another level. "You get that everywhere, but in Boystown, it's just like, *come on*. There's always somebody throwing up, always. I've never been and somebody didn't throw up, or somebody being, like, step all over me or be leaning on you. I hate that. I hate that. I hate that." For Tess, Boystown's drinking culture is inextricable from the neighborhood's whiteness: the drunkenness and what she saw as simply bad dancing "was expected simply because being in white spaces, white people don't care as much as black people do. They don't care about nothing. If you come in there clothes-less, they don't care. You go that type to a black space and it's like, 'What you doing?'"

The nexus of intoxication, whiteness, cis men, and racism pushed Austin over the edge and they stopped going to Boystown altogether. Austin is in their early twenties and grew up in a black community on the city's South Side. As they came of age, they spent time in Boystown as they were learning the ropes of their adult black queer life in the city. "I stopped partying there but I actually went sometime last year and we had a bad experience. This white dude was trying to touch my friend's hair and we were uncomfortable. And I've outgrown the music too, it's whitewashed house music." While black queer people's personal preferences in music, socializing, and intoxication certainly shape their approaches to Boystown, their experiences of the neighborhood—and their decisions to stop frequenting it—are almost always shaped by their exhaustion with having to experience racist interactions therein. Many are like Erica, who puts it plainly: "I don't go out in Boystown at *all*. No. It's just, it's no, no, not at all."

Indeed, individual locations and neighborhoods that have been designated as "safe spaces" for LGBTQ people are rife with the same racism, sexism, misogyny, homophobia, and ableism that have long scripted neoliberal governance.[20] As Christina Hanhardt documents, the revanchist policies of the neoliberal city that demonize low-income people, people of color, and people with insecure housing have also been (inadvertently and not) espoused by lesbian and gay activists in their efforts to establish safe neighborhoods.[21] And because the spatial protocols that structure gayborhoods are also inextricably capitalist, sites like Boystown are subject to ongoing efforts to concentrate and control profit. Individuals, city councils, and neighborhood watch crusaders systematically police people—often black and brown youth, in particular—who do not directly contribute to the

accumulation of wealth in neighborhoods like Boystown, variously alleging these people do not contribute to the neighborhood's housing market, do not pay entry fees and bar tabs in the service industry, and/or do not properly engage with the retail and commercial offerings of the gayborhood.[22]

The racialized territorialization of feeling occurs at the scale of the gayborhood and at the smaller scale of the individual gay bar, where the black queer women in this book regularly face overt and covert discrimination. Ca$h Era, who DJs throughout the city, points to the spring 2019 controversy that surrounded Progress Bar in Boystown, where many if not most of the black queer women in this book first encountered other black queer women and a broader black queer community. A leaked email revealed that bar management implemented a new "no rap" policy, a move that many saw as targeting the bar's black clientele. "Now," Ca$h laments, "the [black queer women's] scene is missing that again because I feel like, with Progress Bar doing that bullshit where they don't want hip-hop music to play anymore, you just had a whole bunch of people of color who are queer displaced. Whereas, like, anybody else who isn't queer gets to go to Boystown *any night*. Friday or Saturday, it doesn't matter: you can party." In this moment, Ca$h reflects on the multiple tensions that circumscribe Boystown and many gayborhoods like it: the racism and antiblackness of the gayborhood not only serves to protect the interests of nonblack LGBTQ attendees but also, significantly, heterosexual people.

Ca$h's comments underscore how, seemingly without fail, black queer women never quite feel right in gayborhoods like Boystown nor within the myriad of neoliberal spaces that frame and contextualize them. There are a variety of implicit and explicit policies that make it supremely difficult for black queer women to take place in, let alone feel right in, the neoliberal city. Their cultural, sartorial, embodied, and affective desires are suspect and their very presence is punishable by everyone from city officials to bar managers. In a dissertation concerned with black queer women's relationships to property ownership, which is to say, black queer women's abilities to sustainably take place in the neoliberal city, Sa Whitley writes, "Under the regime of neoliberal capitalism, the state and the financial industry *zone* black women for dispossession, displacement, and discipline."[23] The ways black queer women are zoned for punishing exclusion reinforce the presumption that they are not and should not be in the scenes and spaces that mark the neoliberal city. As Katherine McKittrick writes in a by-now canonical quote, "If *who* we see is tied up with *where* we see through truthful, commonsensical narratives, then the placement of subaltern bodies deceptively hardens

spatial binaries, in turn suggesting that some bodies belong, some bodies do not belong, and some bodies are out of place."[24] The frameworks that McKittrick and Whitley use to understand black queer women's spatial geographies of dispossession are laced with affective meanings that figure them as always in excess to the neoliberal city: their ways of acting and feeling are not appropriate in gay bars or within or around larger gayborhoods like Boystown.[25] Progress Bar's refusal to play historically black musical genres in fact reflects and feeds into other, differently violent methods of regulating how and where black queer women take up city space. In 2006, a group of black lesbians traveled from New Jersey to hang out in Manhattan's Greenwich Village, long a haven of LGBTQ life. There, they got into a fight with a black man who used homophobic slurs to catcall, antagonize, and ultimately instigate a physical altercation that resulted in him receiving a nonfatal stab wound. Variously dubbed Killer Lesbians, a Lesbian Gang, and The New Jersey 4, they received between three and a half and eleven years in prison—sentencing that literalizes the incommensurability of black queer women's lives with the protocols of neoliberal governance.[26]

SOME PLACES WHERE BLACK QUEER WOMEN MIGHT FEEL RIGHT, THOUGH

Despite the risks, black queer women often desire to engage with varied options that parts of the neoliberal city can offer, be it capitalizing on the cultural milieu of the gayborhood or the housing and service economies of the gentrifying neighborhood. Serena lives in the Kenwood neighborhood on the South Side but regularly makes the thirteen-mile trek to Logan Square and braves the overwhelmingly white crowds to partake in the neighborhood's many bars and restaurants and to find black queer community at Slo 'Mo. "I might be going up North for the good cocktail, but as long as I got my people with me, I'm good." For Serena, consuming the gentrifying neighborhood has to be done with a critical mass of other black queer women who simultaneously act as a shield against unwanted white attention and a bubble in which she can fully inhabit a black queer space. She, not unlike This Black Girl, fully participates in the cultural economies of gentrification but in ways that critically engage the modes of racialized consumption that define how neoliberal city space is valued and inhabited. Their participation in, yet trenchant, embodied critiques of, the gentrifying neighborhood and larger city secure rights to feeling in what Kafui Attoh might call "strategically fuzzy" ways: they continually choose to participate

in the consumptive practices of the neoliberal city, those that can feel *so* good, just as they interrupt, manage, and redirect the racialized territorialization of feeling in the neoliberal city toward the production of a sustainable black queer community in its midst.[27]

This book pays particular attention to three sites in which black queer women strategically forge black queer space in the midst of the neoliberal city that severely regulates their modes of thinking, moving, and feeling. These parties are part of a constellation of a diverse black queer women's scene that includes private homes and public engagements like sporting events; organizations like Affinity Community Services, which serves black LGBTQ+ people; bars like the Jeffery Pub and Club Escape, black LGBTQ bars in the South Shore neighborhood; itinerate parties on the North Side hosted by the now-defunct Chances Dances organization and LesbiFriends Cartel; and sometimes the handful of lesbian, queer, and "ladies night" parties that individual promoters host in more traditional nightclubs throughout the city.[28] The first party of focus, Slo 'Mo: Slow Jams for Homos and Their Fans, is a free, monthly event at The Whistler bar in Logan Square. The second, Party Noire, is not on a firmly set schedule but is held about once a quarter at the Promontory in Hyde Park, near the University of Chicago on the city's South Side. Party Noire is the only ticketed party in the book, though they offer cheaper tickets for people who purchase early, and they offer tickets priced on a sliding scale. The third party is E N E R G Y: A Party for Women + Their Buddies, a free party that is hosted every Sunday at Tantrum—the only black-owned venue in this book—in the South Loop.[29]

Feels Right is interested in the massive amount of labor that goes into creating black queer community on and through the dance floor. As discussed throughout the chapters, the party organizers and DJs are ultimately freelancers who not only throw the three events this book focuses on but host ancillary, related events (sometimes for pay) and often work full-time jobs (either at single locations or, more often, gigs that they cobble together). They are able, in other words, to host free events because of the paid labor that they do above and beyond their party organizing. Party attendees themselves put in a lot of work to party. Indeed, the politics of the black queer dance floor—and the political importance of the black queer dance floor—are embodied in black queer women's commitments to showing up and doing the fiscal, administrative, creative, and energetic work it takes to sustain a regular party. It costs time, money, and energy for attendees themselves to be out at night, whether it's once a year, once every

few months, every month, or, for the brave regulars at ENERGY, every *week.* They plan their work schedules and family duties around attending these parties. They budget time to drive or use public transportation to get to the parties, money to buy tickets and to be able to afford the sometimes costly drinks at the bar, and energy to simply stay out late at night. The tedious work of getting to the function is rewarded when black queer women can revel in transformative senses of self and community.

When Ayana came out to her religious family and community, she couldn't stay home and was deep in the painful but hopeful process of transitioning into new ways of living when we met. She had just turned twenty-one and was coming into her own on queer dance floors. "It's like this is my time to release, to be myself and just breathe instead of what I usually go through during the week." When an opportunity to party comes around,

> I don't know, it's like I call it the ratchetness in me just needs to get out, because during the week I'm, "Yes, oh my God, these are the reports, this is what I'm doing today." And it's just like "Oh, OK, now it's the weekend: I just want to be ratchet, I just want to be myself, I want to be black and carefree, just shake ass somewhere."

The queer parties in this book provide people like Ayana space to shake ass in a community with people who don't require her to define, explain, or defend herself. The work that is "done in the dark of the club," Jafari Allen reminds us, is a "reminder of selfhood for those whose historical (and paradigmatic) experience is precisely and uniquely marked by expropriated labor in chattel slavery, in which Black bodies were (are) not owned by those who inhabit them."[30] On the queer dance floor, black queer women stake claims to their own bodies and to the senses of community that they forge in the process of dancing—however temporary the senses of ownership and belonging may be. Allen quotes Bernice Johnson Reagon in telling us that the nightlife space is "sacred territory . . . the only way you know who you are sometimes has to do with what you can do when you go home from work, change clothes . . . and dance all night long."[31] Back queer women continue to pursue their queer nightlives despite the major and minor violence that can suffuse the neoliberal city, and they do so despite the ways that queer party spaces can be exhausting, intoxicated, fraught with conflict, and full of unsatisfied hopes for community and accountability. They continue to choose to put their bodies on the line and their vulnerabilities on display as they allow friends and strangers alike to see, smell, feel, move with, and at times taste one another because the parties in this book are often the only

places that black queer women are able to *feel right* in their bodies and in the larger community.

Black queer women's shared practices of taking pleasure—of singing along to the music, watching people dance (and hyping them up), dancing themselves, and making platonic and sexual connections with one another—articulate their rights to occupy the landscapes of pleasure that the neoliberal city is organized around. But as black queer women move through neoliberal city spaces that are built around economies of pleasure, they also want and deserve access to the sets of feelings that are associated with these spaces. Their navigations of Slo 'Mo, Party Noire, and E N E R G Y further undermine the ways that neoliberal governance restricts black queer women's access to feeling in complex ways, "because we are able to," Jasmine deadpans. "And we have the right to adjust and have fun and enjoy ourselves in any space that we choose to walk into." Jasmine's concision highlights how black queer women see the constellation of sentiments that inhere in feeling, writ large, as valuable assets that are rights in and of themselves that they can and should be able to secure.

The right to feel good is a veritable political project that drives many black queer women to return to their nightlife scenes time and again, even as their pleasure is seemingly endlessly deferred on the dance floor and in the city. When they arrive at the parties, black queer women can still face the routine exclusions of the door, music, dress, and bathroom policies—despite the massive amounts of work that party organizers do to train venues in antidiscrimination practices. All kinds of administrative and emotional labor is expended in the major and minor conflicts that can suffuse the dance floor, from overly intoxicated attendees, to lovers' spats, to arguments over the music, to people dancing out of pocket (or not dancing at all), to criticism of party organizers, to anxieties about needy partygoers. Black queer women's negotiations of pleasure and conflict in these sites are further textured by the stress, anxiety, and uneasy, terrible, awful, painful feelings that they experience in their everyday lives. They have incarcerated parents, are surviving insecure housing, carry massive student loan debt, work multiple jobs (and are endlessly surrounded by white coworkers at those jobs). They take care of family, go to school, manage intimate relationships, and do all of this infused with the feelings of detachment, disaffection, disorientation, exhaustion, and other "bad" or ugly feelings, senses, sensations, and sentiments that are uniquely conditioned by the ways that neoliberal capitalism creates, depends on, and profits off of black queer women's precarity.[32]

Each chapter in *Feels Right* documents and contextualizes these conflicts in order to argue what should be a simple claim: that black queer women express the very ability to feel in complex ways, to feel beyond the limited binary of pleasure and terror that has long circumscribed black queer life, as a right in and of itself that they should be afforded. The conversations and conflicts that arise in their efforts to feel good on the dance floor are important staging grounds where they literally assert their complex physical but also affective rights to themselves, black queer community, the gentrifying neighborhood, and neoliberal Chicago itself. By putting their bodies on the line on the queer dance floor, black queer women not only imagine but actively construct environments where the spatial and psychic coordinates of black queer life in the larger neoliberal city might have more ethical and just arrangements.

THE FEELING PART OF RIGHTS TO THE CITY

Black queer women's orientations to the queer dance floor offer a way into much-needed analysis of embodiment to the question of rights that have been debated in the academy, in activist circles, and among urban planners and scholars of urban geography, especially those that engage Henri Lefebvre's discussions of what he called the right to the city.[33] Conceived in the late 1960s, Lefebvre's right to the city emerges from an anxiety over the transformation of urban life in the wake of capitalism's intensifying assault on industry, public space, housing, and radical thought alike. Subsequent conversations have generally conceived of the right to the city as access to the legal and economic means to shape how cities are governed and inhabited, especially for those who are most disenfranchised.[34] Insightful interventions into the largely class-based debates have focused on questions of race, gender, and sexuality and have forged important conversations about how minoritarian struggles around the right to the city are quite often struggles around civil rights.[35] Black queer women in Chicago are, for example, doing *immense* amounts of work around rights to the city. These efforts range from demanding accountability from the government and the police by activating marches and die-ins to protest the police cover-up of Laquan McDonald's murder to leading efforts to provide alternate social, cultural, and educational services to the city's black population through organizations such as Assata's Daughters and Black Youth Project 100.[36] Black queer women's political work approaches rights to the city as the combined effort to secure equal treatment under the law and to understand, imagine, and enact rights

to senses of self and community that exceed formal, institutional structures.[37] Here, David Harvey's contributions to understandings of rights to the city are compelling for his suggestion that rights are more than issues of social and economic justice but necessarily encompass the question of desire.[38] For him, the right to the city is the right to determine and fundamentally reshape the forms and functions of urbanization,[39] but he understands that, under neoliberalism, this is not a right afforded to just anyone: one's right to the city is dependent upon the access and mobility that is conferred by property ownership, the security that is enabled by wealth accumulation, and is ultimately supported by "a neoliberal ethic of intense possessive individualism."[40] For Harvey, then, the effort to produce a more just city is a

> question of what kind of people we want to be, what kinds of social relations we seek, what relations to nature we cherish, what style of life we desire, what aesthetic values we hold. The right to the city is, therefore, far more than the right of individual or group access to the resources that the city embodies: *it is a right to change and reinvent the city more after our heart's desire*.[41]

This oft-quoted segment of Harvey's thinking underscores his investment in rights to the city as rooted in collective endeavors of the imagination and desire, and his language is useful for thinking about the multifaceted frameworks that black queer women use to identify their needs within the neoliberal city and advocate for themselves. As Bri explains, desire is perhaps *the* animating principle of black queer women's negotiations of rights, on and off the queer dance floor: "Desire to me is the only commonality that I see across all parties. There's desire to be accepted, a desire to see, and a desire to fulfill desire. And maybe desire to forget." Desire is the animating condition that brings black queer women like Bri to parties like Slo 'Mo, Party Noire, and E N E R G Y, and it is the root of their varied physical and affective entanglements on and off the dance floor—thus serving as an incredibly important root of many if not all of their struggles around rights to space and feeling within and beyond the party spaces.

But while Harvey invokes the powerful if ephemeral realms of imagination and desire in his conversation about rights to the city, he ultimately focuses on the mechanics of relatively organized movements such as the Occupy movement and landless rights movements that pair quality of life arguments with structural, economic ones. *Feels Right* refocuses the geographic scale of the conversation about rights away from such a systematized understanding of politics to look instead toward the informal actions of

the dance floor, where the microgestures of the body and the language and practices of feeling serve as *the* terrain through which rights to the city are negotiated. Black queer women in Chicago are in fact quite suspicious of this formal political sphere, due in no small part to the well-known and widespread corruption of politics in Chicago. By 2018, a kind of state-wide political apathy had taken hold as newly elected Republican governor Bruce Rauner torpedoed the state's economy. The wealthy businessman-turned-politician faced a tall order trying to recover the state's financial status after Pat Quinn, accused of a corruption scandal wherein he misspent $55 million on a Chicago anti-violence program, had to take over from Rod Blagojevich, who was put in federal prison after trying to sell Barack Obama's senate seat. Troubles surround city politics as well. In 2011, Mayor Richard M. Daley, of the dynastic political family, closed his tenure by awarding a seventy-five-year, $1.15 billion contract that privatized the city's parking system before handing the reins over to Mayor Rahm Emanuel, who kicked off his first term by closing half of the city's mental health clinics and fifty public schools in efforts to privatize both.

For black queer women like Tracy, engaging with the formal political sphere is a futile affair because working within such a political system in order to change it assumes that government can or wants to change in the first place:

> It's hard for me to change the way people think I should change. "Go out and vote, do this!" That's not how I'm doing that. You can do that if that's what you want to do. You can play that game if you want to. I know that that's a game. I don't want to be a part of that game. I see that that game has never worked out for us. So, I don't want to play it.
>
> So, trying to fit the way I do things in this gimmicky scam of a fucking political structure, it demeans me. I don't feel safe. I don't feel secure. I don't feel right. I don't feel righteous about anything at all, because it's a setup. Now, the people that are in there working and doing what they can: more power to you. But it's not going to be right until you just tear the whole shit down. You got to tear it down from the root. It's just too fucked up. Honestly, there's no helping it. I mean, this whole tree is just spoiled. Do you understand what I'm saying?

Here, Tracy argues (not incorrectly) that the formal political sphere is a game that has been rigged against black people such as herself. This is not to say that she's *not* political, however. If we only look to formal, movement-based work as prime examples of how black queer women like Tracy advocate

for their physical and affective rights to the city, we will lose sight of the mundane, everyday scenes in which they negotiate rights in the minutia of their everyday social interactions.[42]

Black queer women's navigations of the neoliberal city are not only or always signposted by, for example, overtly racist or homophobic events or marked expressions of institutional or state power. Their desires to make and remake themselves and the city are not solely crafted through formal, organizational responses to rampant deregulation, police violence, and incentivized privatization that constrict their abilities to pay rent and to be safe. Black queer women's practices of engaging with neoliberal governance are not always framed by or executed through formal political channels that are meant to provide people some control over how their cities are governed and inhabited, such as voting, calling upon their local aldermen, calling the police, signing petitions, or securing legal representation. Their experiences of navigating neoliberal governance are frequently shaped at the intimate registers of a conversation or dance movement, in that sharp awareness in the moment of seeing, as This Black Girl did, a crowd of white people take just a little too much pleasure in dancing to black music. Their political tactics are crafted in response to that one white guy who will not stop trying to dance with them when any given black rapper's music comes on or, as Austin describes dance floor dynamics in chapter 2, that "whole different feeling when it's a whole bunch of white people circling around you in a cypher, watching you, or literally saying, 'I like the way y'all dance.'"

Black queer women, in turn, conduct political work of negotiating their rights to the city every time they get on the queer dance floor and wield their entire sensorium as they directly implicate their own bodies and the bodies of those around them. In his ethnography of gay Indian nightlife cultures, Kareem Khubchandani explains that "queer dance at nightclubs and parties then is not merely an escape from politics, but a chance to revel inside them, letting power, meaning, bodies, aesthetics, and affects collide and find each other in new ways, inventing alternative realms to inhabit through sweat, sways, gestures, *jatkas*, and *matkas*, driven by the pursuit of beauty, sex, friendship, and intimacy."[43] Tracy may refuse to engage in the formal political sphere through practices such as voting but she asserts herself as a political being every time she decides to leave the house; she practices politics every time she steps onto the queer dance floor and, as we see in chapter 1, clears space for herself to take up space *as* black and queer. Certainly, black queer women strive to change and reinvent the city after their own hearts' desires, as Harvey writes; it just happens in perhaps less

intelligible and codified, but no less powerful, ways of moving and feeling the body. Their struggles are not only over the right to physically take place in the city but to inhabit it on their own terms. It is a struggle over their physical *and* affective rights to the city.[44]

This was very much the case for This Black Girl. She did not solely lodge a formal complaint to, say, management that white people were taking too much pleasure in black music in the hopes of some form of administrative redress whereby the DJ or bar staff would, for example, change the music. She instead directly intervened into people's very abilities to absorb the hyperpalpable blackness that night and completely dismantled the conjoined kinesthetic processes and social choreographies that flowed from it. She destroyed the production of racialized sound in the bar, sabotaging people's very abilities to sense and respond to it, and renetworked the related practices of white communality through a deeply performative critique of how the kinesthetics of neoliberal city space are circumscribed by logics of race and feeling—and, specifically, the spatialization of blackness and pleasure. This book follows hers and Tracy's cues and pays close attention to how black queer women interface with and remap the racialized territorialization of feeling in Chicago. Their acute awareness and adroit *management* of the racialized networks of music, movement, and feeling on the queer dance floor are an incredibly important part of how they understand their place in the larger neoliberal city—and, moreover, how they reconfigure not only their physical but their affective rights to and in it.

Black Queer Method(s)[ologies], Black Queer Politics

In its rich attention to the body, Performance Studies has given me a wealth of tools to effectively document how black queer women demonstrate this awareness and management. *Feels Right* takes a particular cue from the Performance Studies scholar Dwight Conquergood, who was critical of how the academy's reliance on empirical observation and quantitative analyses often obscured the alternate ways people have of experiencing, understanding, and narrating the world around them. "Marching under the banner of science and reason," he explained, "[the academy] has disqualified and repressed other ways of knowing that are rooted in embodied experience, orality, and local contingencies."[45] For Conquergood, performance ethnography's emphasis on the body had the radical potential to uproot traditional ethnography's roots in racist, colonialist, and sexist gazes. Social scientists have

long been installed as "experts" speaking for and about their interlocutors, often wielding allegedly "objective" data against the very minoritarian subjects they've solicited participation from.[46] In the interest of reframing this power dynamic, Conquergood implored scholars to remain attentive to how gesture, affect, intonation, and other embodied modes of expression reveal the deep meanings and perspectives of those we collaborate with in the field, and he was especially interested in "meanings that are expressed forcefully through intonation, silence, body tension, arched eyebrows, blank stares, and other protective arts of disguise and secrecy"—especially as these acts demonstrate a justified suspicion of social scientists themselves.[47]

This attention to embodied ways of knowing demands researchers engage "in active, intimate, hands-on participation and personal connection" with those in their field sites.[48] Such an approach to performance ethnography requires self-reflexivity and is a deeply vulnerable, embodied process of asking people, often strangers, to share themselves with you. *Feels Right* heeds Conquergood's call for renewed intimacy between researchers and the people who lend us their voices and experiences by self-reflexively contextualizing the act(s) and ethics of conducting research. In doing so, the book contributes to and builds upon the work of black feminist ethnographers who have long demonstrated the relationships among identity, methods, and politics, including but certainly not limited to Aimee Meredith Cox, Jasmine Mahmoud, D. Soyini Madison, Mignon R. Moore, Savannah Shange, Brandi T. Summers, Gloria Wekker, Nikki Yeboah, and, of course, Zora Neale Hurston, whose dogged and long-unappreciated work made ours possible. Diverse black feminist methods are brought together by the belief that the researcher's identity is always imbricated in the work that we do; for ethnographers, this means that our positionality always shapes and is shaped by the people and environments that we work in and always shapes our interactions in the field as well as the ways we reflect upon and analyze them. My own positionality as a black queer woman "mak[es] it impossible for me to think of my study in a detached manner," as Kai M. Green writes, "because in many ways what I say about the people I study, is also what I say and believe about myself."[49] And what I say and believe about myself is that I'm much more complex than I have been thought about, written about, and depicted in academia and in popular culture. This black queer feminist ethnography is committed to what Zenzele Isoke describes as "the impossibility of our wholeness"; it is an impossibility that is structured by ongoing violence that delimits our capacities but that is also an open question that we need to continually mine as evidence of our ongoingness in the face of

that violence.[50] In this final stretch of this introduction, my self-reflexive discussion of methods necessarily bleeds into and lays the groundwork for this book's larger interest in the politics of researching black queer life and specifically serves as a kind of plea for a more rigorous, complex rendering of black queer women's practices of living. Here, then, I begin this book's work of embracing methodological complexity in lieu of a coherent, stable, locatable black queer method or politics—a methodology capable of documenting how black queer women's geographies of feeling right are always on the move and are continually entering new formations that are especially imaginable and palpable on the queer dance floor.

ON METHODS

Without a doubt, this book documenting the complex sensoria of black queer women's nightlives could not have happened without me simply being in intimate space with them at Slo 'Mo, Party Noire, and E N E R G Y. I attended these parties from 2009 until the middle of 2016, when I moved to Seattle for a job in the University of Washington's Department of Gender, Women & Sexuality Studies, though I returned frequently for days, weeks, and summers to attend parties, conduct interviews, and write this book. I balanced fully participating in these events—dancing, socializing, and at times socially drinking—and taking breaks to step back to observe in more critical detail the happenings around me. While in my field sites, I took constant, brief notes charting my experience and observations during any given party and would sit down for the tedious work of fleshing out my notes in detail the morning after. My research practice would continue after the party had ended as well, spilling out to the street in the immediate aftermath of closing time and also extending into the days and weeks after any given event, as I would run into people out and about in the city, at other events, and, especially, on social media, where black queer women post their experiences. These experiences that circle the queer dance floor are just as important to queer nightlife as the dance parties themselves, and they were often the first points of contact I had with black queer women who I later asked to interview with me.

Most important to this book are the formal and informal interviews I conducted with black queer women who circulate through the parties in question. I conducted formal, in-depth interviews with each of the five organizers of the three parties and with twenty-four black queer people I met while researching. Except for three, these people and I were largely strangers

before I introduced myself and my project, which would typically happen in the early hours of a party, on the edges of the dance floor, or as a party spilled out onto the street. I would briefly introduce myself and a generalized account of my project ("I'm writing about black queer women's experiences at parties like [this one we're currently at]") and would ask if they'd be interested in having a conversation about their experiences. We would follow up over email, text, and/or social media direct messages and set a time and place to talk. The interviews were semi-structured and lasted between one and three hours. I would record and transcribe them, and in most cases I invited interlocutors to expand, revise, or redact their interview content as they so desired. Most returned the interviews without edits or annotations, simply OK'ing them, though a couple of interlocutors used the space to think longer and expand upon their words. I use pseudonyms throughout this book, and people were given the opportunity to choose their own pseudonyms if they liked. I use the real names of public figures of the parties in question (organizers and DJs). This option for collaboration allowed the people who so generously gave me their time the last say on their own words.

I also traded stories with these and other black queer women in informal settings: while we waited in line for the same parties, while we danced to our favorite songs, ran into one another on street corners and in coffee shops, and made plans to meet up at events run by people we had in common. These experiences of the expanded social world of the queer nightlife space, and of the ethnographer-interlocutor exchange, point to the more visceral and ephemeral ways of navigating the neoliberal city and of doing research that cannot always be captured in interviews.

My methods of conducting and using interviews for this book are rooted in Conquergood's ethics of dialogic performance: "a way of having intimate conversation with other people and cultures. Instead of speaking about them, one speaks to and with them."[51] Dialogic performance is invested in the fundamental dynamism of interpersonal interaction that shapes the ethnographic encounter, and which can be stripped in traditional ethnographies, and it contains an ethical commitment to bringing our interlocutors into presence. As D. Soyini Madison explains, the emphasis on dialogue moves the ethnographic encounter out of a stagnant, always-past-tense engagement that fixes the interviewee in time (and thus makes them susceptible to misreadings): "This conversation with the others, brought forth through dialogue, reveals itself as a lively, changing being through time and no longer an artifact captured in the ethnographer's monologue, immobile and forever stagnant."[52] *Feels Right* is conceptually and technically organized around this

commitment, evident in my methods of collecting interviews as well as in the literal page space that I give black queer women. Each chapter prioritizes their own words in narrating what happens on and off the dance floors, and I try not to burden their voices with the academic literatures that I put them in conversation with. Instead, scholarly citations serve primarily as supplements that flesh out black queer women's experiences and add deeper context and complexity rather than the other way around: using black queer women's lives as "evidence" that simply bolsters conversations by, among, and for academics. Black queer women subsequently emerge as authorities of their own experience but also as skilled interlocutors whose intellectual and rhetorical skills match and at times outpace those of traditional academics.

While a key goal of dialogic performance is to bring "others" into continual presence, it is as much about the ethnographer's own self-reflexivity. Dialogic performance, in other words, demands ethnographers such as myself account for our presence within the ethnographic encounter, especially as the systems of power that frame academic research can greatly affect how people talk to us and about what. My own experiences as a black queer woman who lived, worked, and partied in Chicago for nearly a decade certainly shaped black queer women's comfort levels sharing their lives with me for an academic book. There are many ways that my interlocutors and I had similar experiences of race, gender, sexuality, family history, class, and/or regional backgrounds, which created an ease in conversation and thus an abundance of interview content. Our points of connection also led to shared understandings of plenty of terms, phrases, statements, sentiments, and descriptions of experiences and there were many times in interviews when I did not push for clarification or definitions that might lead to a more "comprehensive," data-driven interview transcript. I instead let my interlocutors tell me what they wanted when they wanted, due in part to the fact that I was raised in small-town Minnesota where we don't ask a lot of questions and because I simply tend toward concision. As my interviews and this book are an extension of my personality, there were things that, based on the energy of the interview, I simply did not solicit further elaboration on, and there are plenty of things that were discussed and inferred that you simply will not find in these pages. This is certainly the case for some of the commonsense vocabularies and experiences that my interlocutors and I share(d) as black queer people navigating Chicago and its queer nightlife scenes and that I don't believe need to be commonly available to everyone reading this book. Sometimes the dialogic, ethnographic encounter does

not need to make it into the pages of a book—its power lay in the moment of its passing, how it is enfleshed only for the black queer women catching eyes as Aaliyah pumps through the sound system, as we elbow our ways through crowded bars, and in the playful way we pull one another into a circle of dancing friends and strangers.

ON TERMINOLOGY

I use the phrase "black queer women" throughout this book, though "black," "queer," and "woman" are highly unstable terms that cannot contain the lived experiences of the people in this book. All of my interlocutors have had a lived relationship to the category of "woman" but this relationship can and does shift over a person's lifetime. Most of my interlocutors identify as women and several identify as trans, gender nonconforming, nonbinary, genderqueer, genderfluid, androgynous, or prefer not to identify at all. Party organizers have themselves adjusted the language of gender and sexuality to reflect the expansiveness of their attendees. For years, Slo 'Mo's byline was "For Homos and Their Fans," and E N E R G Y's byline was "A Party for Womxn + Their Buddies." By the time of publication, Slo 'Mo described itself as "Slow Jams for Queer Fam," and E N E R G Y explained that "'Womxn' was used to be inclusive of trans and gnc [gender nonconforming] folks. Recently there has been a social push to revert to 'women' and we agree so going forward it will be 'A Party for Women + Their Buddies.'" As we see more in depth in the third chapter, Party Noire has also experimented (and at times struggled) with how to name and describe their focus on diverse genders and sexualities at their events, which helps us see how black queer community is sometimes forged through language that often fails.

The people in this book also have shifting relationships to "black queer woman" and they deploy its vocabularies differently and strategically depending on where they are, who they are among, and how they are feeling. All told, their experiences and definitions of blackness, gender, and sexuality shift and adapt in conversation with how they feel in their physical bodies and what they want to project to others, and they variously present as masculine-of-center, butches (soft and hard), bois, studs, femmes (high and low), stemmes, andros, and other modes of self-fashioning that push against rigid gender categories.[53] The language I use throughout *Feels Right* is attentive to the detailed particularities of each person whose voices appears in these pages: I use the pronouns they used during our interviews

and largely refrain from describing their physical attributes, knowing that these details can change. I updated people's pronouns as needed as this book neared completion, and people's pronouns may have changed by the time you're reading this. My own use of "black queer woman" in this book is adaptable: there are some places where I use it frequently, and other places where I use "black queer" or "black queer people" alongside context clues that draw upon the complex beings of the people I'm referring to.

My use of terms like "woman" and "black queer woman" in this book is subsequently not meant to stabilize the language or practice of identity, nor to center people who were assigned female at birth and identify as women. Instead I aim to think through the ways that terms like "woman," "black woman," and "black queer woman" often organize people's experiences of their bodies and identities but also their experiences of queer nightlife and the possibilities of black queer community in Chicago. My interlocutors' relationships to gender and sexuality often play out in direct conversation with the perceived utility of a phrase like "black queer woman," as well as its component parts. Taylor, for example, reflects on how we live in a racist, misogynist, and transphobic society where "black woman" is one of the few commonly available frameworks through and against which we are read. They moved from a southern state to Chicago in their early twenties, as did several people in this book, and have spent many years understanding (and pressing against) how strict gender roles play out in their family as well as in their friend-based community. Taylor is very aware of the ways that other people's expectations and assumptions about their physical body shape and their experience of identity and politics:

> I think, and not that being a black woman is its own gender, but I feel there are certain things that being a black woman, and experiences that only black women have, [that are] different from being a woman. So, I have those conversations with people as a "black woman" so they understand my experiences—although I identify as being genderqueer and that my gender is, like, all of them. Just everything rolled up into one; however I feel, it is what it is. But as far as I get explaining experiences to people: my experience is being a black woman because that's how the world sees me. Before I open my mouth and tell them anything, the world sees me as a black woman. It's something I have to acknowledge, and I can't just push it to the side because I don't want "woman" to be attached to me daily or something. It's a real thing and it's something I have to accept, that that's how people see me.

Taylor details how the visual, racialized logic of "black woman" scripts their body and everyday life in ways that are extremely limiting to their expansive notion and experience of gender. "Black woman" is a category that does not neatly describe their lived reality but the term and the ideas and the beliefs that are entangled with it deeply condition and at times overdetermine how they relate to their surroundings and how they become legible (and not) within them.

While Taylor sidesteps the idea of "black woman [being] its own gender" in their theoretically complex statement, their comments resonate with black feminist theorists arguing just that. Taylor is in fact in productive conversation with the historian Saidiya Hartman, who describes how "the purportedly intractable and obdurate materiality of physiological difference" is continually reinforced through violent physical, rhetorical, and conceptual regimes that render certain bodies legible as "black woman."[54] Categories of race and gender are inextricable from one another, and they are mutually constituted through a matrix of violence that continually reinforces "black woman" as a seemingly stable and unchanging category.[55] This violence is perpetuated by religious, carceral, educational, and medical institutions, and it impacts the everyday experiences of people like Taylor who are both constrained by the terminologies of "Black Woman" even as it affords them a kind of shorthand, if not communion, around "experiences that only black women have," and that they want to honor.

Many black attendees use "queer" to identify their fluid sexualities and their resistance to the protocols of heterosexuality, and as a shorthand that identifies their broad-based commitments to equity and justice. But my interlocutors' definitions of *queer* are often routed through theories of race that complicate the term's perceived stability. For people like Tess, "queer" operates in direct tension with "lesbian," and they draw upon the specific racial and political connotations of each term in order to make themselves adaptable in different social contexts. Tess breaks down how "queer" and "lesbian" do different kinds of political work, and they often shift between the two (and just as often prefer to not identify at all):

> I feel like they're interchangeable, simply because for me, queer is someone that's free, you don't really want to label yourself. For me, people always ask, "What's your pronouns?" It's like for me, it doesn't matter to me, simply because there's no need to label me. I am who I am, as I am. So, to be queer is to be free. So, I say, "Oh, I'm queer," but sometimes people don't understand what that means, so I say, "Oh, I'm a lesbian," to help, depending on the space.

Tess clarifies that "lesbian" is especially productive: "Honestly, in black spaces. In black LGBT spaces, definitely—because you'll say queer and they'll be like, 'What's that?'—or black-specific lesbian spaces. . . . A lot of the black gay spaces: you're either gay, bisexual, or lesbian. That's it. That's all you can be." Here, Tess maps out how terminologies of sexuality map differently in Black spaces, where "lesbian" is part of a commonsense, if (to some) limited, vocabulary of sexuality. They position queer as a kind of open field for experimentation, as does Jayla, who explains, "When I think 'queer,' I think of just, like, eccentricities. And then when I think of 'lesbian' I think like not just a preference, but just an identity as well." Many in this book strategically distance themselves from "queer" when they want to point to the term's roots in white lesbian and gay communities and the ways that the term is increasingly divorced from a politics of sexuality ("everybody is queer these days") and of race. As Tracy explains, "With a lot of queers that are white, they think they can get away with certain things because they're queer. It's like, no. I see your whiteness underneath your queer blanket." Tracy sees "lesbian" as useful for people who are "wanting to be attached to something that says, 'I'm still black. I'm rooting for black people.'" Tracy thus works to put queer and lesbian in conversation in how she herself identifies as an expressly *Black* political subject: "I want to be a part of the Black Queer Lesbian movement, because I very much fuck with queerness. I am queer myself—and that's not just in the sexuality department, that goes with morals and values and political views and things like that." The dance floor is the site where black women and gender expansive people negotiate the intersections between sexuality and "morals and values and political views" that privilege and prioritize black life—and, across the chapters, we see them grappling with the ways in which something like "black queer" might not be able to hold them together.

In order to further signal the challenges of cohering under experiences of race, gender, and sexuality on Chicago's queer dance floors, I largely use the lowercase "black" throughout this book. Academic and journalistic standards have shifted to using the capitalized Black to describe the shared cultural identity of this group of people—to distinguish people from, as is usually invoked, "a color in a box of crayons." These are necessary and valid changes to make, as they acknowledge the physical and discursive violence that Black people regularly face in the United States; the black queer women in these pages are of course united in the ways that they are subject to the violence of racial organization. I use the lowercase "black," however, to continually underscore to the fact that the very notion of, possibilities for, and

shape of a shared cultural identity and history is precisely what black queer women are negotiating at Slo 'Mo, Party Noire, and E N E R G Y. In each chapter we see how people adjust and modify the terms of racialized, gendered, and sexualized identity as part of the process of attuning themselves to people they want to be in community with. Their methods of navigating the queer dance floor, and their desires that this space organize commonality and communality, are key to their efforts to secure black queer community. This process is often fragile, inconclusive, and absent of consensus or coherence. *Feels Right* thus uses the lowercase to destabilize or delay the kinds of political forms, methodologies, and expectations that become attached to capitalized words, and to document how the desires for and movements toward black queer community are an always ongoing *process*.

Over the course of the book, we ultimately see how "black queer," "black queer woman," and "black queer community" do not neatly secure the political or cultural goals of the people in this book, the parties in question, nor, to be sure, the analytical goals of this book. The black queer women in these pages very much want to shape collectives rooted in shared identities as black and queer people. They at the same time express desires for and work toward modes of collectivity that are rooted above all in shared practices of thinking, communicating, feeling, and, of course, dancing that often press the limits of strict identitarian categories and the politics they assume. *Feels Right* allows us to think with terminologies that don't quite work because they point to politics that are kind of shaky, and ends and means that don't quite sync up. The linguistic, physical, and affective adjustments black queer women make on these unstable grounds chart the very experience of living black queer life under neoliberalism.

Where Methods and Terminologies Get a Bit Sticky . . . in a Good, Productively Challenging Way

All of my attention to the methods and politics of a rigorous, queer, black feminist performance ethnographic practice lowkey flew out the window the minute This Black Girl ran out of the bar, though. The moment is theoretically compelling because it demonstrates how dance is a highly political arena with explicitly geographic acts that speak to the racialized sociality of the city and propose alternative spatial realities-cum-practices to it. But my use of that moment flies in the face of ethnographic traditions of opening a text with an example that is the seemingly perfect microcosm for the

larger arguments to be made. It's actually a pretty bad example to start this book with, due in no small part to the fact that I was never able to find and interview "this black girl" and so their pronouns and sexuality remain undefined to me and to you. This Black Girl may not identify as a woman or as a queer subject at all—and might vehemently refuse the infantilizing of "girl." To top it off, their actions were not even staged in a particularly queer nightlife setting. The anecdote usefully underscores, however, the political resonances of how black gender becomes mapped onto bodies and space. I subsequently conclude this introduction by tracking how the person who opened this book becomes produced as "This Black Girl" at the nexus of race, gender, space, and, importantly, the racialized political expectations that bring the three together. This meaning-making process reflects how the black queer women throughout this book become legible and not within neoliberal Chicago.

This Black Girl's intervention into that hip-hop party remains the most astounding upheaval of a dance floor that I encountered during and after my fieldwork collection. One of the reasons that the moment has stuck with me for so long is because it is such a fierce dismantling of the white spatial imaginary that values (profitable) forms of leisure that depend on the removal of poor and nonwhite people from the landscape, and a calling out of how this white spatial imaginary depends on blackness for its survival.[56] It is moreover within "a black radical tradition of gendered fugitive practice" that Sarah Haley describes as activated through sabotage, through "ruining, destroying, and disabling intentionally" those mechanisms of control that have imprisoned black women and demanded their labor and subservience.[57] This Black Girl's sabotage followed by *I'm headed back to the South Side* mapped the desire lines that emanate outward from the mundanely oppressive geographies of the gentrifying neighborhood and toward other sites where This Black Girl's possibilities of feeling, feeling good, or at least feeling more comfortable may fully bloom.

In her flight from the bar, This Black Girl's sabotage fits neatly within a genealogy of Black political thought and practice that is organized around geographies of just beyond the here and now, including Afrofuturist space trails, underground railroads, the out of field and out of doors, the undercommons, and more. These geographies may have different inflections, methods, and end points, but in what Kara Keeling describes as "radical Elsewheres" we can ultimately imagine and work toward different coordinates of black life "that might support alternative forms of sociality, forms that are not necessarily predicated on familiar modes of exploitation and

domination."[58] These radical Elsewheres are similar in that they are almost always approached through fugitive movement away from *here* and toward *there*. The differences in how, exactly, *here* and *there* are located in real and imagined space says much about how we understand the constraints around, and possibilities of, living within our current surroundings.

This Black Girl's departure from Logan Square to other desired sites generates complicated questions about the terrain of doing and imagining black queer life and politics within the heart of the neoliberal city. Her flight to the radical Elsewhere of the South Side certainly mapped an alternate geography of black life—but she did so by reinscribing a cultural logic of racial authenticity that depends upon and reinstantiates the imperceptibility of black people within the gentrifying neighborhood. Her black politics worked by coding a historically black music genre as the privileged domain of black people (*All the music you're playing is for niggas and I'm the only nigga in here*) and, in locating the South Side as a space of refuge for her black subjectivity, spatializing black people as excluded from Logan Square and the broader North Side. In other words, while This Black Girl productively critiqued the racial contours of the hip-hop night, the bar, and the neighborhood, she simultaneously reproduced the very logics of the neoliberal city that argue that black people do and perhaps *should* exist outside the boundaries of the gentrifying neighborhood. This Black Girl's complex movements (stopping movement in the bar, her own movement away from the bar) reiterated the boundaries around the racialized territorialization of feeling in the city. This Black Girl had to leave the space in order to contest it and in doing so she argued that one cannot practice black politics and stay in the gentrifying neighborhood—that life must exist in its fullness beyond it. This geography of the just beyond has very particular consequences for how black people actually become perceptible and not in the gentrifying neighborhood. As This Black Girl called upon her own visible body to hold the room accountable, an accountability activated as she authenticated her own sovereignty as *the only nigga in here*, she foreclosed the possibility that there was another nigga in the bar that night: me.

What might it mean that This Black Girl didn't see me in the cramped bar? What other sets of questions must be raised when we consider that she may have seen but simply not cited me in her radical disavowal of the white sociality of the scene? That she saw me but could not figure me into her dissent from it? These questions remain largely unanswerable as I've been unable to find This Black Girl, to interview her, to allow her side of the story to be present in these pages. She has always remained out of view,

eluding my efforts to find her on social media and through connections to other people who were in the bar that night. My desire to find her presses against my belief in the power of opacity, dissemblance, and subterfuge in the doing of black feminist politics: that she has a right to remove her physical and psychic self from view, and that doing so has long been important to maintaining a sense of self (and a semblance of sanity) in a Western political field that demands the hypervisibility of black women.[59] Yet the scant information and the gossip and speculation that came out about This Black Girl in the days and weeks after the sabotage raise important questions about evidence and ephemera in the doing of and theorizing about black queer life in the neoliberal city—and raise important questions about how performance ethnography, a field that regularly deals with the ephemerality of the body, might grapple with them. Narrating This Black Girl as a real person and a symbolic figure demonstrates how performance ethnography can balance an ethics of care rooted in (real, perceived, and speculative) shared identities with a commitment to detail, despite the fissures such detail may reveal. It's important to render the fully enfleshed complexity, if not messiness, of the terms and fields that black queer women operate in to most fully represent the deft skill with which they navigate the tricky politics of and beyond the queer dance floor.

The night of her sabotage, This Black Girl was on a date with a white man who owns a small business; a man who, in the aftermath of her flight, shrugged and exclaimed to the bar staff, "Some sauces are just spicier than others!" Later, in a now-deleted Facebook post, he wrote, "First time dating a Puerto Rican woman!" an exclamation that simultaneously gestured to her act as a kind of exotic flair stereotypical of women in the Caribbean and diminished the seriousness of her critique of the hip-hop party. This information was collected in informal conversations I had in the days and weeks after the event, and in informal conversations (re)collected over the course of writing this book. While I was able to track down the man in question, years later, he didn't remember This Black Girl other than the fact that they had met earlier that night.

Read through the optics of her speculative biographical data, This Black Girl's sabotage of the hip-hop party and her later mis- and unnaming underscore the historical intersections of race and nationality in neighborhoods like Logan Square (and Humboldt Park) that have strong roots in Puerto Rico and reflect how black and Puerto Rican political identities have often intersected.[60] Scholars of Puerto Rican life in Chicago have discussed how Puerto Rican political identities are sometimes shaped in conversation with

how African American people are imagined as always organized around resistance.[61] We can think of how This Black Girl's mobilization of blackness in her sabotage, read in conversation with this literature, speaks to the ways that Puerto Rican activists have sometimes selectively taken up blackness to articulate resistance to the state and to establish cultural capital in Chicago.[62] This Black Girl's sabotage gestured to the strategic though sometimes tense racial, national alliances that have been forged within and across Puerto Rican communities in Chicago and in Puerto Rico, generating fruitful opportunities to theorize the complex ways in which blackness and black political identities can be politically activated in a diverse Logan Square milieu.

I am not interested in the "truth" of This Black Girl's identity but I am interested in thinking about how the mechanisms of foreclosure, the shutting down of complexity, that This Black Girl enacted rendered an unambiguously Black (*I'm the only nigga in here*) politics attached to an unambiguously Black territory (*so I'm headed back to the South Side*)—an enactment of unambiguousness that was further solidified in the immediacy of her being named "This Black Girl." What happens when we understand This Black Girl's sabotage as perhaps not all that radical, but reflective of a familiar and commonsense Black politics that depends upon the hypervisibility of the sovereign body? In what ways might this Black politics reproduce the demands neoliberal governance places on individuals to be particularly visible in order to demand, let alone secure, rights? How might such an embodied politics reinscribe a restrictive geography of feeling in a segregated landscape? Perhaps this is a Black politics that is stripped of affective complexity as it virtually demands that black people's pleasure only cohere in territories such as the South Side that have been deemed decidedly Black, no matter their relatively ambiguous borders and demographic diversity.

Speculating on This Black Girl's very presence as a black Puerto Rican woman moving between the South Side and Logan Square suggests that the socio-racial organization of the city's segregated, gentrifying landscape is fundamentally more ambivalent than the physical and affective black-white binary her sabotage was contextualized by. Maybe she came to be at the bar because she was part of, if not wholly integrated into, a larger social and cultural network that is organized in and around the residential, commercial, and service options that mark the neighborhood's gentrification. While the South Side has been home to a historically large black population, it has also long been home to diverse white ethnic communities—Irish Americans, in particular—and is increasingly home to Latin and Central American migrant populations. Her sabotage marked the racialized expectations and

assumptions structuring the very possibilities for pleasure at that hip-hop party just as her flight obscured the multiple paths of arrival, methods of taking root, and processes of self-reflexivity that people of color enact within scenes and spaces where their presence is seemingly unexpected.

Feels Right presses against the imperative that black politics be organized around a geography of the just beyond and takes its cue from the idea that This Black Girl's most radical act may not have been her leaving the bar but her making it physically impossible for other people to reproduce the expected sociality of the gentrifying milieu. This book pauses in the moments before This Black Girl leaves the bar, idles when the music cuts out and people have to awkwardly take time to reorient themselves to the sights, sounds, movements, and feelings of the dance floor. This time-space of negotiating one's own body's relationships to the structures of feeling that enmesh it is a potent site of knowledge production, and it is a potent site that black queer women wield to articulate their personal and political investments in the racialized sociality of the queer party and the city that surrounds it. While This Black Girl must seemingly be in flight away from the dance floor and toward another place so that her black politics can become perceptible, the black queer women throughout the rest of this book refuse to leave the party or the gentrifying neighborhood and instead work to remake the very frameworks of black queer perceptibility itself.[63]

They do so by putting their individual bodies on the line, as This Black Girl bravely did, but always with an eye toward the possibilities of the larger collective's staying power. This isn't to discount the important personal and political work This Black Girl did in leaving the function, especially as her work was articulated through extreme vulnerability and risk. The goal is to just remain on the dance floor a bit longer and see what happens. The chapters look to the microgestures of presence that are enacted when black queer women take public transportation from their black neighborhood to the function across town in a white neighborhood, when they choose to pay entry fees and buy drinks and food at a party, in the decisions they make to get on the dance floor or jump in the middle of a cypher, when they grab onto one another and move together in the dark heat that is club-life. In spaces where sight and language are often made impossible in the cramped, dark loudness of a Slo 'Mo party, the possibilities of black queer politics and of black queer community consolidate around hearing a particular song and moving to it, in gripping the dancing bodies around you, and at times getting up on stage and screaming at them. These possibilities accumulate in the rush of four hundred people Swag Surfing at Party Noire

or the dissonance of finding that a potential lover cannot keep up with your twerking at E N E R G Y, which helps you decide to come back next week to try again with someone new.

These are modes of aggregating that cannot rely upon sight, the sovereign body, or the explicitly black territory but that coalesce through touch, in the indistinctness between a single dancer and the cypher that hypes her up as she dances, and in that one very black queer night that you have that helps you face the sea of whiteness when you wake up in the morning. This is black queer politics rooted in the depth of what the body marked by black queer gender and sexuality wants and sometimes feels but may never fully attain, because its attainment would spell the end of the world as we know it—not that this book isn't invested in that. It is just, in the meantime, dedicated to the task of defining and describing the plain hard work that black queer women put into making lives worth living, loving, and knowing in the neoliberal city.

NOTES

Introduction

Throughout this book, I use the given names of party organizers and party DJs, as they are public figures. I use pseudonyms for all party attendees.

1 The use of the phrase "N-word" here is reported speech: the DJ used this phrase in recounting the events that had just transpired.

2 While long home to a large number of black residents, the South Side has a complex racial and ethnic geography. The neighborhoods composing the South Side have long been home to successions of migrants, including African Americans, Polish, Irish, and Latin Americans. See Allan H. Spear, *Black Chicago*; and Mario Luis Small, "Is There Such a Thing as 'The Ghetto'?," 413–21.

3 Black women have been doing excellent work on the ways that blackness becomes an aesthetic in and of itself that is used to market the so-called revitalization of historically black neighborhoods. See, in particular, Brandi Thompson Summers, *Black in Place*. Allie Martin's doctoral work pays particular attention to the aestheticization of racialized sound. "Sonic Intersections: Listening to the Musical and Sonic Dimensions of Gentrification in Washington, D.C."

4 In Chicago, political ward maps are often the most specific indices of the racial makeup of neighborhood areas, despite the ways that the jagged boundaries of wards (meant to equalize the number of voting constituents) often encompass and cut across vastly different communities. The Logan Square neighborhood includes, roughly, a majority of the 35th ward and the top half of the 26th ward (the bottom half being the overwhelmingly Puerto Rican neighborhood, Humboldt Park). Of the 101,604 people counted in 2010, just 8,426 classified as "black." Emily Chow, Christopher Groskopf, Joe Germuska, Hal Dardick, and Brian Boyer, "Reshaping Chicago's Political Map: Race, Ward-By-Ward," *Chicago Tribune*, July 14, 2011, accessed March 5, 2018, http://media.apps.chicagotribune.com/ward-redistricting/index.html. For an introduction to the movements of Puerto Rican communities in the region, see John Betancur, "The Politics of Gentrification," 780–814; and Natalie P. Voorhees Center for Neighborhood and Community Improvement,

"Appendix: The Socioeconomic Change of Chicago's Community Areas (1970–2010)," https://voorheescenter.red.uic.edu/wp-content/uploads/sites/122/2017/10/Appendix-Oct-14.pdf.

5 The Target store is now part of the reigning visual hierarchy in this previously industrial landscape that is giving way to the signage of hypermodern consumer spaces. On the displacement of Chicago's industrial landscapes in this area, see Robert Giloth and John Betancur, "Where Downtown Meets Neighborhood," 279–90.

6 For some insights into the practice of, and resistance to, asset stripping, see Jodi Melamed, "Racial Capitalism," 76–85; Sara Safransky, "Rethinking Land Struggle in the Postindustrial City," 1079–100; Clyde Woods, "Les Misérables of New Orleans," 769–96; Clyde Woods, "'A Cell Is Not a Home.'"

7 Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier*. Throughout this book I deploy "minoritarian" in the spirit of José Esteban Muñoz, who claimed the term to describe people who, despite their vast differences, are compelled to relate to the normative formations of racialized gender and sexuality anchoring national formations in similar ways. José Esteban Muñoz, *Disidentifications*. Joshua Chambers-Letson elaborates that minoritarian "describes a place of (often uncomfortable) gathering, a cover, umbrella, expanse, or refuge under and in which subjects marked by racial, sexual, gender, class, and national minority might choose to come together in tactical struggle, both because of what we share (often domination in some form by the major, or dominant culture) and because of what makes us different" (*After the Party*, 15–16).

8 Neil Smith, "Giuliani Time," 1.

9 Martin F. Manalansan IV, "Race, Violence, and Neoliberal Spatial Politics in the Global City," 4n.

10 This gluing is not only to particular neighborhoods but also to spaces such as the kitchenette and the prison cell. See Rashad Shabazz, *Spatializing Blackness*.

11 On the development of Chicago's black neighborhoods in the twentieth century, begin with Arnold R. Hirsch, *Making the Second Ghetto*; and Davarian L. Baldwin, *Chicago's New Negroes*.

12 There are many studies on the racism that underwrote (and continues to underwrite) white flight, suburbanization, and a generalized fear of the city. Nathan Holmes charts how these sentiments play out in 1970s crime films, which reflected contemporaneous anxieties and had an indelible effect on how we engage contemporary cities *and* film. See Holmes, *Welcome to Fear City*. Steve Macek usefully loops in the question of right-wing moral politics. See Macek, *Urban Nightmares*. In *Race for Profit*, Keeanga-Yamahtta Taylor details the infrastructural mechanisms that have historically locked black people into underserved homes and communities.

13 Mary Pattillo's work on black, middle-class homeownership in Chicago demonstrates the fragile status of "ownership" for black families whose holdings have always been precarious in the face of the racist organization of the city. See *Black Picket Fences* and *Black on the Block*.

14 Here, this book contributes to a diverse collection of ethnographic work on queer social dance spaces as invaluable sites where individual and collective political identities are

forged; examining, in many ways, what Judith Hamera describes as "dancing communities" in *Dancing Communities*. See, for example, Fiona Buckland, *Impossible Dance*; Kareem Khubchandani, *Ishtyle*; Ramón Rivera-Servera, *Performing Queer Latinidad Dance, Sexuality, Politics*; Micah Salkind, *Do You Remember House?* Related work is being done on black and brown ball cultures. Marlon Bailey, *Butch Queens Up in Pumps*.

15 Rochella Thorpe did critical, foundational ethnographic work on midcentury black lesbian communities and, specifically, the tenuous relationships they had in and to lesbian bar spaces. Thorpe, "'A House Where Queers Go,'" 40–61. Thorpe's oral histories of lesbian Detroit are collected in the Division of Rare and Manuscript Collections at the Cornell University Library. The documentary on black lesbian activist Ruth Ellis also spotlights the importance of the private home to consolidating black queer sexualities. *Living with Pride: Ruth Ellis @ 100*, directed by Yvonne Welbon (1999).

16 There has been a lot of important writing on the role of the bar within lesbian communities, especially working-class lesbian bar culture in the twentieth century. Two good places to start are Marie Cartier, *Baby, You Are My Religion*; Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather*; and Kelly Hankin, *The Girls in the Back Room*. The dismantling of what lesbian bars *have* existed is wrapped up in changing economic structures that make it harder for people to purchase buildings and/or to hold onto leases—political economic conditions often obscured in larger debates around the place of trans people and politics within lesbian (and feminist) spaces. See Clare Forstie, "After Closing Time," 130–42. Jack Gieseking has been hard at work collecting oral histories of multiracial, multigenerational lesbian people whose continuing search for community traverses these multiple sites, reading these narratives across diverse archives. See essays like "Dyked NY," 1–17; and their book *A Queer New York*.

17 That said, the sites that black life were removed to become important "interzones" where people of all races and sexualities congregated, and the linking of race, sexuality, and vice often had its own spatial protocols and profits. Kevin J. Mumford, *Interzones*.

18 On the particular (and particularly insidious) impact of zoning regulations on gay nightlife, see Laam Hae, *The Gentrification of Nightlife and the Right to the City*. Samuel Delaney's beautiful rendering of the transformation of what would become Times Square documents how zoning, policing, and public morality initiatives violently dismantled erotic theaters, video stores, corners, alleyways, and apartments in which gay men found communion and community. *Times Square Red, Times Square Blue*.

19 Grace Kyungwon Hong discusses such selective absorption of *some* kinds of difference in *Death beyond Disavowal*. On gayborhoods more broadly, and on Boystown and Andersonville in particular, see Amin Ghaziani, *There Goes the Gayborhood?*

20 In response to ongoing criticisms of the neighborhood's actual *lack* of inclusivity and many instances of overt racism, the Northalsted Business Alliance decided to rename Boystown to Northalsted in September 2020 and developed the slogan "Chicago's Proudest Neighborhood." It remains to be seen whether this rebranding will have any effect on how embedded whiteness is in the neighborhood.

21 Christina Hanhardt, *Safe Space*.

22 There has luckily been a lot of work done on how fucked up Boystown can be: Owen Daniel-McCarter, "Us vs. Them!," 5–17; Zachary Shane Kalish Blair, "Machine of Desire"; Rae Rosenberg, "The Whiteness of Gay Urban Belonging," 137–48; Theodore Greene, "Gay Neighborhoods and the Rights of the Vicarious Citizen," 99–118; and Jason Orne, *Boystown*.

23 Sa Whitley, "The Collective Come-Up," 13.

24 Katherine McKittrick, *Demonic Grounds*, xv. While McKittrick receives this particular citation, this book, and my entire way of thinking, wouldn't be possible without her entire body of work.

25 We could have a longer conversation that foregrounds how race and sexuality script the expectations of affective comportment as central to legibility within gayborhoods, and the ways in which the diversity of black queer woman's affective inhabitations continually provide a crisis of legibility for men, in particular. If that's a line of thought you're interested in, consider reading Ana Ramos-Zayas's detailed ethnography of black, brown, and immigrant life in Newark, New Jersey. In it, she demonstrates how one's status in the neoliberal city is very much regulated by one's ability to skillfully deploy the racialized codes of affective comportment that neoliberal governance demands. These codes conform to what José Esteban Muñoz described as the United States' "'official' national affect, a mode of being in the world primarily associated with white middle-class subjectivity" and which he wryly described as "flat and impoverished." Ramos-Zayas, *Street Therapists*; Muñoz, "Feeling Brown," 70.

26 LeiLani Dowell, "Wolf Packs."

27 Kafui Attoh, "What Kind of Right Is the Right to the City?," 10.

28 Here, I refer to Nikki Lane's doctoral work on black queer women's scene space in the Washington, DC, area. Charneka Lane, "In the Life on the Scene."

29 All three of these parties experienced massive shifts in the COVID-19 pandemic that wreaked havoc worldwide, beginning in winter 2020. Tantrum was among many locally owned venues that permanently closed during this time.

30 Jafari Sinclaire Allen, "For 'The Children' Dancing the Beloved Community," 319.

31 Allen, "For 'The Children,'" 318.

32 Here I am indebted to Sianne Ngai's *Ugly Feelings* as well as to the "affective turn" more broadly.

33 Henri Lefebvre, "The Right to the City," 147–60.

34 As a starting point, see Chris Butler, *Henri Lefebvre*. See also Peter Marcuse's and Mark Purcell's many writings on the right to the city.

35 See, for example, Kafui Attoh, *Rights in Transit*; Mustafa Dikeç, "Justice and the Spatial Imagination," 1785–1805; Tovi Fenster, "The Right to the Gendered City," 217–31; Kurt Iveson, "Social or Spatial Justice?," 250–59.

These conversations indirectly converse and at times overlap with Hannah Arendt's examination of the right to have rights in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, an examination that continues to spark conversation around the forms, functions, possibilities (and lack thereof) of citizenship, politics, and the ontological status of the human. To dip your toe into this vast field of conversation, start with Stephanie

DeGooyer, Alastair Hunt, Lida Maxwell, and Samuel Moyn, *The Right to Have Rights*; and Frank I. Michelman, "Parsing 'a Right to Have Rights,'" 200–208; before moving on to Jacques Rancière, "Who Is the Subject of the Rights of Man?," 168–86.

36 Of course, "black queer woman" is not a neat political category and it does not always signal the kinds of progressive, racial justice politics that the aforementioned organizations espouse. Chicago mayor Lori Lightfoot, elected in 2019, is the first openly gay black woman to serve as mayor of a major city in the United States but has spent a career working for, supporting, and protecting one of the most violent police forces in the nation.

37 Don Mitchell's work usefully ties together these two realms of rights to the city discourse, providing rich political-economic context for the production and regulation of public space alongside analyses of the social imaginary of public space that scripts who we believe "belongs" and not therein. Mitchell, *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space*.

38 David Harvey develops a conversation about the right to the city across multiple texts. See Harvey, "The Right to the City," 2003, 939–41; Harvey, "The Right to the City," 2008, 23–40; and Harvey, *Rebel Cities*.

39 Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, 5.

40 Harvey, "The Right to the City," 2008, 32. He elsewhere explains: "We live in a society in which the inalienable rights to private property and the profit rate trump any other conception of inalienable rights you can think of. This is so because our society is dominated by the accumulation of capital through market exchange. That social process depends upon a juridical construction of individual rights" ("The Right to the City," 2003, 940).

41 Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, 4. Emphasis added.

42 Important work has been done on the microgestures of dissent and reformation that black communities have long practiced, and they often reveal the fundamental ambivalences they have to formal politics and the systems of capital that structure them. James Scott's and Robin D. G. Kelley's work on "infrapolitics" is essential to analyses of the politics of quotidian black performance—as is Cathy Cohen's generous and generative critique of them, especially the ways that our understandings of black politics often assume intentionality where it may not be. Cohen, "Deviance as Resistance," 27–45; Kelley, *Race Rebels*; Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance*.

43 Khubchandani, *Ishtyle*, 4.

44 Cameron Duff, "The Affective Right to the City," 516–29. Bibi Bakare-Yusuf connects the question of embodied rights amid waning juridical access in the essay "I Love Myself When I Am Dancing and Carrying On: Refiguring the Agency of Black Women's Creative Expression in Jamaican Dancehall Culture," 263–76.

45 Dwight Conquergood, "Performance Studies," 146.

46 Conquergood maps the risks of the ethnographic encounter in "Performing as a Moral Act."

47 Conquergood, "Performance Studies," 146.

48 Conquergood, "Performance Studies," 146.

49 Kai M. Green, "The Essential I/Eye in We," 195.

50 Zenzele Isoke, "Black Ethnography, Black(Female)Aesthetics," 153.

51 Conquergood, "Performing as a Moral Act," 10.

52 D. Soyini Madison, *Critical Ethnography*, 11.

53 A small collection of scholars has dutifully documented the diverse gender expressions that occur among black lesbian and queer communities. See, for example, Laura Lane-Steele, "Studs and Protest-Hypermasculinity," 480–92; Mignon R. Moore, "Lipstick or Timberlands?," 113–39.

54 Saidiya Hartman, *Scenes of Subjection*, 58.

55 Two foundational texts of this argument are Hortense Spillers, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe," 65–81; and Evelynn Hammonds, "Black (W)holes and the Geometry of Black Female Sexuality," 126–45.

56 The construction of this sentence is indebted to Barnor Hesse's definition of black politics, which he defines, in part, as follows: "As an irrepressible symptom, the recurring incidence of black politics reveals and exposes a modern Western social order of things constitutively liberal-colonial and democratic-racial, whose discourses and institutions of representation are socially grounded in disavowing that creolized inheritance" (977). Black politics, in other words, points to the fact that black/blackness is central to yet continually erased from the very formation, definition, and expression of politics in the West. See Hesse, "Marked Unmarked," 974–84. On the white spatial imaginary, see George Lipsitz, *How Racism Takes Place*.

57 Sarah Haley, *No Mercy Here*, 200–201.

58 Kara Keeling, *The Witch's Flight*, 21–22. Previous iterations of this introduction have spent much more time reading This Black Girl through and as Keeling's "black femme function," which names a politics of racialized gender and sexuality as well as a mode of thinking and a mode of imagining radical politics.

59 On opacity, see Édouard Glissant, *Poetics of Relation*. On dissemblance, see Darlene Clark Hine, "Rape and the Inner Lives of Black Women in the Middle West," 912–20.

60 As a result of an expanding labor market in the Midwest, the 1950s brought an influx of Puerto Ricans to the Chicagoland area who, because of their status as US citizens, were able to easily remain even after their labor contracts expired. Logan Square, West Town, and Humboldt Park soon established themselves as areas with the largest Puerto Rican populations. See Ana Ramos-Zayas, *National Performances*.

61 For a discussion of Puerto Rican racial formation in Puerto Rico, see Isar P. Godreau's work, namely, *Scripts of Blackness*. For a discussion of how Puerto Rican identities are specifically shaped in musical conversation between US and Caribbean notions of blackness, see Ramón Rivera-Servera, "Musical (Trans)Actions," 1–13. For a discussion of the gendered dimensions of racial formation in Puerto Rico, see Maritza Quiñones Rivera, "From Trigueñita to Afro-Puerto Rican," 162–82.

62 Of Puerto Rican perceptions of African Americans in Chicago, Ramos-Zayas writes, "The vision of Puerto Rican culture as black gains value in the market of symbolic goods only insofar as it is assumed to be pure and representative of resistance. Hence, activists could frown upon rap as co-opted and as an expression of Puerto-Ricanness

that is identified with U.S. black people while celebrating [Puerto Rican mulatto nationalist Pedro] Albizu along the lines of Afro-Puerto Rican Pride" (*National Performances*, 196). While activists might selectively take up blackness to articulate resistance to the state, and Puerto Rican youth might express hip-hop literacy to establish their cultural capital within a global city, Ramos-Zayas observes that Puerto Ricans throughout Chicago "categorized blackness as African American culture, a gendered and classed hyperculture capable of co-opting Puerto Rican youth, women, and ultimately, nationalism. . . . African American blackness was hyperculturalized through a youth street culture embodied in gangs and in constructions of a threatening black professional elite" (*National Performances*, 230).

63 In this language of perceptibility, I am indebted to Kara Keeling and her thorough narration of the black femme function within the cinematic structures that govern how we see (and not) black women on film. This is, for Keeling, a deeply proprioceptive process—which lends her film studies analysis to a performance studies reading of everyday life. For Keeling, the appearance of the black femme on screen instigates a process whereby our common sense is shifted, reorganized, or adjusted to accommodate her; her appearance makes us think beyond the frame to a lifeworld where she makes (more) sense. The site of the dance floor, where music and movement coalesce across bodies in deeply physical ways, and beliefs about race, gender, and sexuality are physicalized in hyperpalpable ways, is a useful site to extend Keeling's theorizing. Keeling, *The Witch's Flight*.

Chapter 1: Slo 'Mo and the Pace of Black Queer Life

1 As briefly discussed in this book's introduction, the title of the Slo 'Mo party changed by the time of this book's publication. Where it was long described as a party for "Homos and Their Fans," it is now described as "Slow Jams for Queer Fam." By the time you're reading this, the party's name and intended community may have changed again.

2 Throughout this book I use the words "straight," "queer," and "heterosexual" knowing that these terms never contain the range of feelings and beliefs about sex, sexuality, and identity that the people I am describing experience. Here, I use "straight" to describe people who may very well identify otherwise, but whose dance floor performances of gender and sexual preference, among other things, contribute to a public persona of heterosexuality.

3 On the mechanics and politics of TIF programs, see Richard Briffault, "The Most Popular Tool," 65–95; Diane Gibson, "Neighborhood Characteristics and the Targeting of Tax Increment Financing in Chicago," 309–27; and Brent C. Smith, "The Impact of Tax Increment Finance Disticts on Localized Real Estate," 21–37. See also Ben Javorsky's many-years-long, devasting critiques of Chicago's use of TIF published in the free weekly alternative newspaper *Chicago Reader*.

4 Teska Associates, "Fullerton/Milwaukee Tax Increment Financing Redevelopment Plan and Project Eligibility Study: Amendment No. 1," October 25,