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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I was raised within a tradition that emphasizes collective memory, the defense of the dead, and celebration in the face of unthinkable odds. This ongoing emphasis enters the world in many forms: the testimony, the ring shout, the shout-out, the altar call and street-corner altar for the slain, the naming of ancestors before any ceremony worth its salt can begin. So I want to close this work, my first book of literary theory, by invoking my great-grandmother Carrie, whose mother was born into the steel grip of chattel slavery near a town named for the man who claimed legal ownership of her and her kin, Lillington, and was somehow able to make a kind of life in spite of the brutal absurdity of this fact. I would like to dedicate this book to her and to my grandparents Charlotte and Levi, who met in a strawberry field 116 miles away from Lillington, in Wilmington, North Carolina. The central ideas undergirding this book bear the trace of the myriad forms of violence designed to circumscribe their lives, as well as the irreducible valor, and imagination, they cultivated in the midst of that terror. I am because they were, and are, and any good I accomplish is the result in no small part of their freedom dreams and prayer without ceasing.

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