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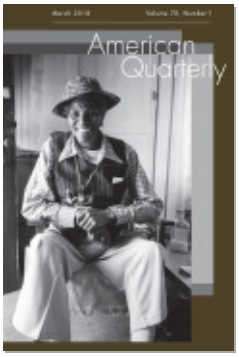

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In 1953 rhythm and blues fans across the United States rocked to the music of Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton. A three-hundred-pound, twenty-six-year-old black woman who dressed in suits and ties, Thornton was signed to Houston-based Peacock Records. She recorded a song called "Hound Dog" while on a trip to Los Angeles during the summer of 1952. Written by Jerry Leiber and Mike Stoller, the song tells the story of a woman fed up with a no-good, cheating man. Peacock released "Hound Dog" the following February, and it eventually soared to the number one spot on the rhythm and blues charts, where it remained for seven weeks.[1] After 1956, though, Thornton's name would not be the one primarily associated with "Hound Dog." That year Elvis Presley recorded a cover version that became a smash hit, propelling him to rock 'n' roll stardom. A decade later, Janis Joplin asked Thornton for permission to record "Ball and Chain," a song Thornton wrote and frequently performed live. Joplin and Big Brother and the Holding Company debuted their version of "Ball and Chain" at the Monterey Pop Festival in 1967. Thornton's performances inspired generations of musicians, even though she remains less known than Presley or Joplin.[2]

The story of white artists achieving fame after covering a song by a black rhythm and blues artist is a common one in the history of race and rock 'n' roll. Little Richard, who was Thornton's friend and briefly her label mate at Peacock Records, recorded "Tutti Frutti" in 1955. The song rose to number seventeen on the pop charts. But the popularity of Little Richard's recording was eclipsed by Pat Boone's cover version, which reached number twelve. Little Richard rooted Boone's rise in racial politics: "They needed a rock star to block me out of white homes because I was a hero to white kids. The white kids would have Pat Boone up on the dresser and me in the drawer 'cause they liked my version better, but the families didn't want me because of the image that I was projecting."[3]

The "image" Little Richard projected was controversial because of its association with queerness and race. Like Big Mama Thornton, Little Richard

visually and sonically blurred the line between masculine and feminine. Both artists' sartorial choices and music reflect a commitment to gender nonconformity and a rejection of heteronormativity. The careers of Big Mama and Little Richard in the late 1940s and 1950s illuminate how queer performers infused expressions of gender nonconformity into rhythm and blues that influenced the development of rock 'n' roll, and how antiqueerness in that era affected the history of recorded music.[4] The scholarship on rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll has interrogated race, but has not fully incorporated queerness, or the sociopolitical climate of the Cold War and civil rights era that affected queer performers like Big Mama and Little Richard, into this history.[5] Drawing on Roderick Ferguson's notion of "queer of color analysis," this essay uses culture to examine the "intersections of formations" that affected queer black performers.[6] As Ferguson shows, racial difference and incongruities in gender have been inextricably linked for queer African Americans, since these categories constantly intersect. This essay examines how the racial and gender politics of the fifties affected black popular culture, and uses Big Mama and Little Richard to demonstrate the racial *and* queer roots of rock 'n' roll.

This queer reading of these black southern performers does not make assumptions about their sexual identities. (Indeed, although contemporaries speculated about her sexuality, Thornton never publicly identified as a lesbian.) Queerness can refer to gender performance as well as sexual desire and sexual practice.[7] "The analytical category of queer," writes the historian Nyan Shah, "upsets the strict gender roles, the firm divisions between public and private, and the implicit presumptions of self-sufficient economies and intimacy in the respectable domestic household."[8] But because of emerging ideas about sexuality in the United States, Thornton's and Pennimen's nonnormative gender presentation led their peers to assume that they were homosexual. After World War II, homosexuality was increasingly defined by "sexual object choice," which most Americans often identified as an aspect of gender presentation.[9] Their appearance would have linked them to homosexuality, which placed them at risk for backlash.

Big Mama's and Little Richard's experiences illustrate how shifting ideas about gender altered black recorded music, and how gender-nonconforming artists adapted to a transitioning racialized sociopolitical climate. They cut their teeth as singers in the late 1940s in traveling troupes, where queer acts were part of the foundation of the early rhythm and blues music played to black southern audiences. An examination of these live shows reveals a history of queerness on the so-called Chitlin Circuit. But when these gender-nonconforming artists shifted from exclusively live performers to musicians

whose songs were mass-produced and mass-marketed, they had to dilute the queer content of their performances. The postwar political climate led to a backlash against queerness, which affected the ways that black artists could express gender nonconformity by the mid-1950s. Discussions of marriage and family during and after World War II fueled this backlash.[10] Anticommunist propaganda promoted the heteronormative American family as the best way uphold national values. Any deviation from that norm was subversive and could undermine American democracy. In response, civil rights activists promoted black heteronormativity and respectability in their struggle for freedom. Because of that climate, musicians like Big Mama and Little Richard faced more restrictions than their blues predecessors of the twenties and thirties. The frank discussions of sexuality from people like Gertrude "Ma" Rainey and Walter Davis had all but disappeared from popular music by the late fifties. Backlash against queerness changed African American recorded music.

Yet Big Mama and Little Richard eschewed heteronormativity, even in a climate of repression. During an era of national conformity, these black entertainers pushed the boundaries of what was acceptable and respectable. They subverted normative notions of gender at a time when the sanctity of a traditional heterosexual family affected society, politics, and culture in the United States. Their rejection of the normalized repressions of Cold War society appealed to young audiences. By focusing on queer expression, this essay seeks to expand our understanding of the kinds of rebellious and gender-nonconformist expressions that African Americans popularized and that remained a vital aspect of rock 'n' roll performance.

Black Queer Performers and Southern Blues

Willie Mae Thornton and Richard Wayne Penniman came of age during the "classic blues" era of the 1920s and 1930s. Thornton was born on December 11, 1926, in Alabama and spent her early years in Ariton, a small town seventy-miles south of Montgomery. "The first blues I ever heard was Bessie Smith, Memphis Minnie and Big Maceo," she once told an interviewer.[11] The young singer began performing covers of her favorite blues songs at a tavern in Barbour County when she was around thirteen years old. One year later, she joined Sammy Green's Hot Harlem Revue, an Atlanta-based touring company. The revue consisted of fifty comedians, dancers, and musicians who played theaters from South Carolina to Texas.[12] Green billed fourteen-year-old Thornton as the "New Bessie Smith."[13]

The singers Thornton admired performed during an era when sexual frankness and gender nonconformity permeated blues recordings. Her idol, Bessie Smith, reportedly dated women and men.[14] Blues artists like Rainey and Davis openly expressed gender-nonconforming behaviors and homosexuality in the twenties and thirties. Rainey famously sings about her sexual pursuit of women and her fondness of masculine attire in "Prove It On Me Blues":

> Went out last night with a crowd of my friends,
> They must've been women, 'cause I don't like no men . . .
> It's true I wear a collar and a tie,
> Makes the wind blow all the while
>
> Wear my clothes just like a fan
> Talk to the girls just like any old man
> 'Cause they say I do it, ain't nobody caught me
> Sure got to prove it on me.[15]

These assertions of queerness appeared on mass-produced, mass-marketed major label recordings. Paramount Records did not shy away from the queer aspects of Rainey's performance in the promotional literature for "Prove It On Me Blues." An advertisement that likely appeared in black newspapers in 1926 featured an illustration of a woman clad in a jacket, vest, and tie talking with two women in dresses. In the background, a cop watches the scene suspiciously. Black queerness was a noticeable and popular aspect of blues recordings in the classic blues era.

Figure 1.
Advertisement for Gertrude "Ma" Rainey's "Prove It On Me Blues"

Blues artists often used terms that referred to gender nonconformity in black communities. Numerous songs referred to "sissies," which described effeminate men, and "bulldaggers," a term for women who dressed in masculine attire. Before World War II, words like *sissy* and *fairy* referred to a person's "gender status" rather than "sexual object choice." The definition of a "sissy" or "fairy" depended more on dress, or other attributes labeled feminine, than sexual behavior.[16] These terms appeared in some of the frank discussions of sexuality in blues songs of the 1920s and 1930s. Davis proclaims his willingness to bed an array of sexual partners in "Poor Grinder Blues": "If you can't bring me a woman, bring me some sissy man." His contemporary, Ma Rainey, sings in 1926:


"PROVE IT ON ME BLUES"
by "Ma" Rainey
What's all this? Scandal? Maybe so, but you wouldn't have thought it of "Ma" Rainey. But look at that cop watching her! What does it all mean? But "Ma" just sings "Prove It On Me" in this great new Paramount Blues No. 12668, with a bang-up accompaniment by the Tub Jug Washboard Band. Don't fail to get this record from your dealer, or send us the coupon.
[12668—Prove It On Me Blues and Hear Me Talking To You, "Ma" Rainey and the Tub Jug Washboard Band.]
12666—Penitentiary Blues and Long Lastin' Lovin', Blind Lemon Jefferson and His Guitar.
12664—Bone Orchard Blues and Western Union Blues, Ida Cox; Piano, Banjo and Cornet Acc.
12665—Low Down Mississippi Bottom and Tom Cat Blues, "Mr. Freddie" Spruell; Guitar Acc.
12660—Ash Tray Blues and No Need of Knockin' On the Blind, "Papa Charlie" Jackson and His Blues Banjo.
12661—Saint Louis Man and Kentucky Stomp, Dixie Four.
12667—Ramblin' And Ramblin' Boy Gonorrister Blues and Detroit Bound Blues, Blind Blake and His Guitar.
12658—House Rent Stomp and Big Bill Blues, Big Bill and Thomps; Guitar Acc.
12662—"Lectric Chair Blues and See That My Grave Is Kept Clean, Blind Lemon Jefferson and His Guitar.
12659—Jimmy Rodgers Blue Yodel and Way Out On The Mountain, Louis Warfield; Guitar Acc.
Electrically Recorded!
Paramount Records are recorded by the latest new electric method. Greater volume, amazingly clear tone. Always the best music — first on Paramount!
Favorite Spirituals
12669—Ride On, King Jesus and Our Father, Norfolk Jubilee Quartette.
12660—His Eye Is On The Sparrow and I Wouldn't Mind Dying If Dying Was All, Norfolk Jubilee Quartette.
SEND NO MONEY! If your dealer is out of the records you want, send us the coupon below. Pay postman 75 cents for each record, plus small C. O. D. fee when he delivers records. We pay postage on shipments of two or more records.
The New York Recording Laboratories
Send me the records checked (✓) below 75 cents each.
Name
Address
City State
Paramount
The Popular Race Record

My man got a sissy, his name is Miss Kate
He shook that thing like jelly on a plate

Now all the people ask me why I'm all alone
A sissy shook that thing and took my man from home"[17]

While blues fans enjoyed songs that described a wide range of sexual behaviors and desires, middle-class, Christian African Americans often condemned expressions of queerness.[18] Adam Clayton Powell, pastor of the influential Abyssinian Baptist Church in Harlem and a leader in the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP), preached against homosexuality. In 1929 the black *New York Age* published a series of Powell's sermons on "sexual perversion." Powell argued that homosexuality caused "men to leave their wives for other men, wives to leave their husbands for other women, and girls to mate with girls instead of marrying."[19] He considered homosexuality a sin that threatened the sanctity of the black family. But blues-loving African Americans rejected efforts to sanitize or pathologize black sexuality, and they continued to support performances that featured queer themes into the 1940s.

Queer acts were a popular aspect of traveling African American musical revues. These shows frequently featured men dressed in drag. Richard Wayne Penniman of Macon, Georgia, was one such performer. Born in 1932, Penniman had endured taunts and violence as a boy because of his love of makeup and his preference for female playmates: "The boys would want to fight me because I didn't like to be with them. I wanted to play with the girls. See, I *felt* like a girl."[20] As a teenager, he experimented sexually with men and women. He began singing with touring companies in the late 1940s, when he adopted the stage name "Little Richard." At around the same time, he began performing in drag. The stage offered a space where queer performers like Penniman could subvert gender norms. Onstage they explored and received adulation and money for behaviors deemed unacceptable to their families. Since they traveled to new places each week, queer acts did not necessarily threaten the established heteronormative order of the towns they visited while on tour.[21]

Little Richard first flirted with female impersonation during a stint with a traveling show called "Sugarfoot Sam from Alabam." When one of the women in the troupe failed to show for work one night, he took her place. He donned a dress and took the stage as a character called "Princess Lavonne." For ten dollars per week, he then performed in drag for a troupe called the Tidy Jolly Steppers. He later joined the L. J. Heath Show from Birmingham, Alabama. "And *they* wanted me to dress as a woman, too," he recalled. "They had a lot

of men dressed like women in their show. Guys like Jack Jackson, who they called Tangerine, and another man called Merle. They had on all this makeup and eyelashes. I'll never forget it."[22] Penniman remembered that gender ambiguity was a central feature of the touring shows of the era. In New Orleans he met an entertainer named Patsy who wore a mustache along with a dress. "He didn't look feminine. Didn't look like a pretty woman."[23] Perhaps Patsy was less interested in appearing as a "pretty woman" than subverting notions of femininity and masculinity during performances.

These southern-based troupes used the newly developed interstate system to travel outside their communities and into new terrain. "Postwar road building was a boom to queer networking," the historian John Howard notes.[24] By joining traveling acts, or even attending their shows when these troupes came into town, queer people from small southern locales like Ariton, Alabama, or Macon, Georgia, encountered one another. Thornton and Penniman likely met in Atlanta, where both performed with troupes that visited popular venues on Decatur Street.[25] Broadway Follies, which hired Little Richard, played Bailey's 81 Theater during the same years as Sammy Green's Hot Harlem Revue. Queer people participated in the diverse acts that took the stage. When describing the performers in Broadway Follies, Little Richard remembered, "everybody on his show was a sissy."[26]

The queer aspects of traveling shows extended to the songs performed onstage. The earliest version of Little Richard's "Tutti Frutti," which he sang while touring with a troupe, championed anal sex. His live audiences delighted in lyrics like "Tutti Frutti, good booty / If it don't fit, don't force it / You can grease it, make it easy."[27] These live performances continued a tradition of black queer expression that had thrived since the 1920s.

By the early 1950s both Thornton and Penniman had signed recording contracts, which took their acts to a broader rhythm and blues audience. Both wound up in Houston, where they recorded for Peacock Records, owned by a black entrepreneur, Don Robey. Thornton first visited Houston while on tour with the Hot Harlem Revue in 1948, and after a dispute over wages with Sammy Green, she decided to leave the tour and make a home in the city. Little Richard arrived there in 1952.

Houston's rollicking nightlife undoubtedly appealed to the young singers from the southeast. By the time they arrived, the city was home to nearly six hundred thousand people, with a population that was about 21 percent black.[28] Houston was a Jim Crow city that legally segregated its black population; however, it offered economic opportunities via steady paying gigs. Economic

support from a growing population of wage-earning African Americans buttressed a thriving music scene. Since World War I, black migrants from Louisiana and East Texas had flocked to Houston to find jobs, as the city began to grow into an economic center because of the export of cotton and oil. By the 1930s black communities in the city's Third Ward, Fourth Ward, and Fifth Ward had their own entertainment districts.[29]

The place known as the "Bayou City" was a prime destination for top rhythm and blues acts after World War II. Thornton recalled seeing performers like Louis Jordan, Fats Domino, and Big Joe Turner when they played Houston venues. Black schoolteachers, beauty salon owners and employees, railroad workers, and longshoremen packed local nightclubs. One musician, Amos Milburn, born in the Fifth Ward, recalled, "There was a time when there was a lot of money around, and people were really boozin' it up heavy."[30] Thornton quickly made a mark on the local scene by singing with the house band at the Eldorado Ballroom, a black-owned venue.[31] By 1951 she was recording for Robey's label and touring the country with other Peacock acts. Artists signed to the label also performed at his nightclub, the Bronze Peacock. Thornton worked especially closely with label mate Johnny Otis, the Greek American rhythm and blues singer from California. Otis hired Thornton to be part of his touring show, the Rhythm and Blues Caravan, in 1952.[32]

In the earliest days of Thornton's career as a Peacock artist, her stage name and style of dress indicated a rejection of normative femininity. Although young and childless, Thornton acquired the name "Big Mama." Otis claims to have given Thornton her stage name: "I gave her that name [Big Mama] just as a show name and it stuck."[33] The moniker had less to do with any maternal sensibilities Thornton possessed than to a lack of conventional femininity. As Jack Halberstam notes, names like "Big Mama" and "Ma" Rainey "should be read as a way of anxiously re-coding the non-femininity of these women."[34] Thornton's style of dress defied notions of conventional femininity. She preferred to wear clothing that her peers considered masculine. In a photograph taken with a fan in Houston, she wears a tie and trousers, with her short hair slicked into the "conk" hairstyle popular with black men.

People who met her in Houston noted her masculine style: "She was big and wore overalls like a man," noted the musician Tommy Brown.[35] Thornton's love for suits and overalls may have been connected to her size. As she affirms in one song, "They call me Big Mama 'cause I weigh 300 pounds."[36] When the songwriter Mike Stoller first met Thornton during the session that produced "Hound Dog," he was taken by her stature: "She appeared to be

Figure 2.
Willie Mae "Big Mama" Thornton and Andrew Steptoe in Houston, Texas

about 300 pounds and strong as an ox."[37] At that size, she likely faced limited options for dresses found in the women's section of clothing stores.

Thornton's masculine presentation did not deter Robey from signing the young singer from Alabama. Indeed, several gender-nonconforming performers signed with Robey's company. The gospel singer Willmer "Little Axe" Broadnax was a transgender man who sang with groups like the Fairfield Four and the Five Blind Boys of Mississippi. Born in Houston in 1916, Broadnax was assigned female at birth. His family acknowledged him as a boy at a young age. When a census taker visited the Broadnax family in 1930, he recorded thirteen-year-old Willmer's gender as male.[38] He and his brother sang duets, with Willmer's piercing tenor vocals drawing acclaim. They recorded several singles for Peacock in the 1960s.[39]

Little Richard also brought a gender-bending element to Peacock. Little Richard and his group, the Tempo Toppers, recorded their first songs for the label in 1953. Other Peacock artists observed the Georgia native's feminine appearance. Otis was enjoying a cup of coffee at Club Matinee in Fifth Ward when someone told him, "Johnny, you just gotta come and see this dude in here." Otis then met "this outrageous person, good-looking and very effeminate, with a big pompadour," who proceeded to perform a high-voltage routine. "I remember it as being just beautiful, bizarre, and exotic, and when he got through he remarked, 'This is Little Richard, King of the Blues,' and then added, 'And the Queen, too!'"[40] Houstonian Grady Gaines, who played saxophone with Little Richard in the fifties, recalled that the singer "always wore that makeup, and he had that same curly hair that looked like a lady would have her hair fixed back in that day, but it looked real good. He wore that pancake makeup, number 29, I think it was called." The singer from Macon referred to himself as "the Georgia Peach," and as Gaines recalled, "he looked good enough to be a peach. His skin would be so pretty and had such a beautiful color to it."[41]

Big Mama and Little Richard became recording artists during a moment when queerness was transforming. While the labels "sissy" and "bulldagger" typically referred to gender presentation before World War II, after the war, queerness was increasingly linked to sexual behavior, too.[42] Because of the shift, observers in the 1950s would have interpreted Thornton and Little Richard's gender nonconformity as a sign of homosexuality. Thornton's peers often linked her style of dress to her sexual orientation, especially since dress was one of the primary ways that young women established and expressed lesbian identity in the 1950s.[43] Otis recalled, "People in the band heard these rumors that she was gay. She was a big woman and sometimes wore suits or masculine kinds of clothes."[44] With their gender-nonconforming personal styles, Big Mama and Little Richard made queerness a visible—and potentially threatening—aspect of rhythm and blues.

Thornton and Penniman faced a different sociopolitical climate by the early fifties, which affected the ways queer themes could be presented in popular music. By the time they began recording, mass-produced and mass-distributed rhythm and blues music did not contain the openly frank expressions of queer behavior found in classic blues records. While Davis or Rainey could make direct references to gender ambiguity and homosexual desire in their blues recordings, artists of the postwar era could broach these topics only in front of a live audience when they performed with traveling musical revues. As

they transitioned from nightclub performers to recording artists, singers like Thornton and Little Richard had to negotiate a different set of norms regarding sexuality and gender expression.

The Cold War, Civil Rights, and Backlash

By the early 1950s the racial and sexual politics of the civil rights era and Cold War increasingly affected black queer artists. A witch hunt designed to root out queer people from the federal government ushered in the decade. In February 1950 Joseph McCarthy made a speech claiming that 205 communists worked for the State Department. Deputy Undersecretary John Peurifoy denied those claims, but did state that ninety-one homosexuals had been forced out of the department, because of the security risks they posed.[45] McCarthy linked sexual deviance with political disloyalty. The conflation of sexuality with politics emerged from the notion that homosexuals and communists shared commonalities, such as a lack of "masculine autonomy that enabled loyalty to the nation." As Andrea Friedman writes, "Homosexuals were slaves to their passion for other men, communists to the Soviet masters."[46] The federal government also took aim at culture products. While the State Department's witch hunt focused on gay men, scrutiny of culture products brought women into the spotlight. Congress held a series of hearings in 1952 to identify and ban lesbian pulp novels, for example.[47]

Scholarly discussions of race and family contributed to negative portrayals of homosexuality in black communities. Writers often drew on the work of the sociologist E. Franklin Frazier, author of *The Negro Family in the United States*, who linked homosexuality to the erosion of black families. Frazier argued that because of slavery, African American women took the leading role in their families. Furthermore, the Great Migration had left black families culturally damaged as they failed to adapt to urban life. These phenomena affected gender norms and black sexual behaviors, including homosexuality. Black men, he posited, used sex to assert their masculinity, but "when the Negro male cannot attain his maleness through normal sex outlets, there always the female role open to him. . . . Not only does the color line tend to disappear among homosexuals, but in the female role the Negro male no longer offers a challenge to white male domination." He theorized that homosexuality was one black male response to the emasculation these men experienced in a white-dominated society: "The Negro male homosexuals who publicly exhibit their deviation may represent the sexual adjustment of the Negro male to American society." Since its publication in 1939, Frazier's research has often served as

the basis for other theories on gender and sexuality in black America.[48] In their 1951 study, *The Mark of Oppression: A Psychosocial Study of the American Negro*, Abram Kardiner and Lionel Ovesey argued that the racial caste system in the United States made black women economically independent heads of household, which made them manly. They also asserted that black men had become passive because Jim Crow demanded that they be subservient to white people. This resulted in black emasculation, which led to homosexuality.[49] These studies portrayed black homosexuality as pathological, an outgrowth of African Americans' debased status.

At the same time, panic over "sexual deviates" affected notions of criminality in postwar society. Stories of sexual assaults on women and children led to moral panic and public outcry over sex deviancy—which included homosexuality.[50] Founded in 1951 by John H. Johnson, *Jet* magazine articles offer an African American response to the panic over sexual deviates. A 1954 article called "Women Who Pass for Men" warns about masculine women driven to murderous rages: "Despised by society, they travel an uncharted road which often leads to a jail cell." Another article told the story of Leatrice Calloway, a twenty-one-year-old who murdered her "sweetheart" when she learned the woman was also dating a man. According to the magazine, a different woman received the death penalty for strangling and drowning her female lover.[51] These sensational stories played on an older trope of the murderous lesbian that had circulated since the late nineteenth century.[52] *Jet*'s articles normalized the connection between crime, deviancy, and masculine-presenting black women.

This sociopolitical climate affected African American popular culture. At least one queer black artist who enjoyed mainstream success during the Jazz Age publicly repented for her transgressive behavior. Gladys Bentley had made gender ambiguity part of her stage persona and personal life in the twenties and thirties. Bentley, who began playing the piano and singing the blues in Harlem in 1928, performed in a tuxedo and top hat, and she reportedly married a white woman in a civil ceremony. She sometimes performed under the stage name "Bobbie Minton."[53] Neither her sexual preferences nor her love of tuxedos dampened audiences' enthusiasm for Bentley's dynamic performances; in fact, her gender transgressions likely appealed to her black audiences. In the 1950s, however, Bentley disavowed her past behavior. She penned a personal essay for *Ebony* magazine that described the "personal hell" she experienced while living in "that half-shadow no-man's land which exists between the boundaries of the two sexes."[54] The 1952 essay, "I Am a Woman Again," asserts that Bentley began wearing her brother's suits when she was

ten years old and that her mother had always wanted a boy instead of a girl. Bentley remade her public image in the fifties by claiming aspects of normative femininity. She married a man, wore silk dresses in publicity photos, and expressed sadness over what she called "the sex underworld in which I once lived."[55] Bentley's public repentance may have been motivated by a desire for a career revival. She appeared on the television show "You Bet Your Life" in 1958, but she struggled to recapture her prewar success.

The publication of Bentley's *Ebony* article, and the focus on masculine women in *Jet*, were part of a wave of press dedicated to examining queer women in the early fifties. Gender studies scholar Amanda Littauer cites a variety of factors that contributed to the public fascination and curiosity: "anxiety about wartime disruptions of sexual norms, Cold War fears about hidden threats to American family life, the influence of Freudian psychology, women's growing social and economic mobility and Alfred Kinsey's studies of 1948 and 1953."[56] Black writers often tackled the topic of same-sex desire. In the winter of 1957, the *Chicago Defender* published a five-part series on homosexuality called "The Third Sex."[57] These articles often posited that people who expressed sexual and gender nonconformity were "psychologically immature," so press attention only contributed to paranoia about homosexuality in mainstream black discourse on gender and family.[58]

Fear and suspicion of queerness during the Cold War affected the black civil rights movement, especially as the movement gained success.[59] Black activists knew that opponents of the movement could also use any signs of sexual transgression or gender nonconformity to label African Americans as unfit for citizenship; therefore, respectability politics shaped the way civil rights activists represented black womanhood and manhood. Montgomery activists rallied around Rosa Parks after her 1955 arrest because she met the standards for heteronormative, middle-class respectability.[60] Meanwhile, Bayard Rustin, a black activist who played a crucial role in advancing the practice of nonviolent, direct action demonstrations, faced ostracism because of his sexual orientation. His conviction in 1953 for "moral charges" involving sexual activity with two other men led some civil rights leaders to shun him. Adam Clayton Powell Jr., a black congressman from New York, often characterized queer people as criminal degenerates, citing "an alarming growth of sex degeneracy" among African Americans. To ensure that Rustin did not attend the 1960 Democratic National Convention as part of Martin Luther King's contingent, Powell threatened to unleash a rumor that Rustin and King were lovers. King folded under the pressure. The push for civil rights necessitated the appearance of respectable, heteronormative blackness.[61]

The explosion of rhythm and blues into the black mainstream coincided with the Cold War / civil rights era, so musicians like Big Mama Thornton and Little Richard had to negotiate intensifying backlash against queerness. The management at Peacock worked to change Thornton's appearance. The singer's penchant for overalls and suits troubled Evelyn Johnson, Robey's business partner. As the manager of the Buffalo Booking Agency, which promoted Peacock artists, Johnson tried to reconstruct Thornton's personal style into one that fit notions of normative black femininity in the 1950s, like the women featured in African American magazines like *Jet*, which published covers that spotlighted young, thin, light-skinned black women clad in gowns and expensive jewelry. Peacock personnel likely did not want to bring negative attention to the record label by promoting a masculine-presenting black woman, so Johnson hired a stylist to conform Thornton's appearance to the popular notions of black femininity presented in *Jet*. "We bought her a lace dress, fixed her whole luggage up, and hired a woman to travel with her to dress her, you know," Johnson recalled.[62] In publicity photographs, Thornton appears in lace dresses and pearls.

The recorded music of the 1950s was also less explicit than music of the classic blues era, when major labels released and publicized music recorded by gender-nonconforming artists who sang openly about queer themes. Little Richard had to mute some of the explicit sexuality that he had displayed in his stage performances in the late forties. When he recorded his old stage staple "Tutti Frutti" in 1955, the lyrics could not discuss anal sex. By this point, Penniman had left Houston and was recording for Specialty Records. Robert "Bumps" Blackwell, who worked with him at Specialty, pushed him to change the words: "I knew that the lyrics were too lewd and suggestive to record. It would never have got played on the air."[63] He worked with Dorothy LaBostrie to create new lyrics. During the studio session in New Orleans, Penniman sang "Tutti frutti, oh rutti," instead. The changes made to the record suggest that, while artists had expressed queerness in live acts, by the fifties the recording industry frowned on these expressions—especially since records like "Tutti Frutti" had the potential for mainstream, crossover success. The racial politics of civil rights and the Cold War made labels less willing to release recorded music with such an explicit reference to behavior that was considered sexually deviant.

As a queer black man in the 1950s, Little Richard had to consider two interconnected sexual matters—queer backlash and the "black man as beast" stereotype that cast black men as sexual predators. Although these issues are not typically analyzed together, both affected notions of African American

sexuality during that era.[64] In 1955, the same year that Little Richard scored a hit with "Tutti Frutti," two white men in Money, Mississippi, murdered a fourteen-year-old black boy named Emmett Till for allegedly flirting with a white woman. An all-white jury acquitted the men, but both later admitted to committing the murder. Three years later in Monroe, North Carolina, a judge sentenced two black boys, eight-year-old David E. "Fuzzy" Simpson and ten-year-old James Hanover Thompson, to reform school for kissing two white girls during a game.[65] Black male artists who attracted legions of white fans risked violence for cavorting with the white women who attended their shows. Indeed, one of Grady Gaines's bandmates, a man named Joe Bell, ran into trouble in Houston for dating a white woman. According to Gaines, Bell "started going around town" with his white girlfriend. During one show, police officers "took Joe off the stage and beat him up terrible. . . . Joe messin' with that white woman in public just brought too much attention to himself."[66] White southerners would not tolerate even the suggestion of black male attention to white women. Even as rhythm and blues artists achieved crossover success with white audiences, they could not cross the sexualized racial lines maintained by Jim Crow.

According to one bandmate, Little Richard made gender nonconformity part of his band's persona in order to avoid the appearance that the black men attracted white women. Gaines claims, "Early on, Richard had the idea to make the band dress and look like we was gay so it wouldn't upset the whites who thought that we might be after their women!" Gaines does not explain which aspects of their costuming seemed "gay" to him, but he was confident that the strategy worked: "It kind of eased that way of thinking and made them more comfortable if they thought we were gay and wouldn't have no problems out of us, but the girls were still after us big time."[67] Little Richard began his career as a traveling performer who sang in drag in the forties, so he may have assumed that the appearance of gender-nonconforming black men onstage would be acceptable to audiences. But in the mid-1950s, the terrain had shifted for recording artists. Queerness threatened notions of respectability and family, which were part of a national political project.

Little Richard faced persecution for his nonnormative gender presentation. As songs like "Tutti Frutti" made him a household name, his live performances drew negative attention from law enforcement. Police officers in El Paso, Texas, paid particular attention to his long, dark locks. Chuck Conners, a drummer, recalled, "In those days, you didn't see many people with long hair. Well, they arrested Richard for that in Texas." When the police raided the show, Richard

was onstage in his full glory: "He had this long hair, and he was shakin' about up on the stage, you know?"[68] The fact that the band was composed of African American men, and fronted by a black man with a queer aesthetic, posed a threat to Texas law enforcement officials. As Little Richard and his bandmates learned, both interracial sex and queerness could draw violence and harassment from the state.

Hound Dogs and Lady Bears

Little Richard may not have performed in drag or sang about anal sex when he became a recording artist, but he did not entirely conform to heteronormative standards. With his love for pancake makeup, arched eyebrows, and long hair, he presented himself in a way that his peers understood as queer.

Figure 3.
Little Richard in 1969. Photograph by Charles Sawyer

Emerging from a tradition of sexually frank blues music and popular traveling road shows that featured drag, Little Richard's growing popularity was partly due to his queerness and not in spite of it. Gender nonconformity was subversive and rebellious, which appealed to young people who felt stifled by the sociopolitical climate of heteronormative respectability. What threatened older generations thrilled the youth of the fifties.

Like Little Richard, Big Mama Thornton's gender nonconformity gave her a rebellious, hell-raising persona. She often rejected Peacock's efforts to change her appearance. She frequently told Evelyn Johnson, "Look here boss lady, I ain't wearing that."[69] She asserted her own sense of style whenever possible. As a member of the Rhythm and Blues Caravan, she journeyed with Johnny Otis to New York to perform at the Apollo Theater in Harlem in 1955. Once they arrived, Otis informed her that he wanted her to wear a gown when she took the stage. Thornton initially balked at the idea. After arguing heatedly about the dress, though, she finally consented. When she took the stage, however, she kicked up her legs to show everyone the cowboy boots she wore underneath the gown.[70] By wearing boots, Big Mama found a transgressive way to express gender nonconformity in live performances.

Thornton's music also portrayed her as someone who did not conform to society's standards of respectable womanhood. Her most popular songs rejected certain aspects of heteronormativity. Songs like "No Jody for Me" illustrate a recurring theme of Thornton's musical performances—a general dissatisfaction with men. Released in 1951, "No Jody for Me" offered a new interpretation of the familiar Jody Grinder character. Jody is the "backdoor man" who has affairs with married women who provide for him financially. The character is often celebrated for his sexual prowess. Generations of singers and storytellers, especially those from black communities, have used the phrase, "Ain't no use in going home, Jody's got your girl and gone." During World War II, black soldiers brought the Jody tradition to the military, where he has remained the subject of marching cadences known as "Jody calls." It is unsurprising, then, that Jody appeared in a rhythm and blues record released just six years after the war ended.[71]

The name Jody is historically synonymous with sexual pleasure; however, Thornton makes it plain that she has no love for Jody. Her song places Jody in a context that would have been familiar to many listeners—a time for war. The lyrics especially emphasize Jody's economic relationship with women: "No-good Jody fooled me . . . and spent up all my dough." When the war ends (and her partner presumably returns home), Jody "didn't come back no

more." Furthermore, her husband beats her after discovering her infidelity. For the rest of the song, she continues to detail why Jody was a mistake.[72] The song portrays the heterosexual marriage as violent and unfulfilling. Furthermore, by making Jody a negative figure, Thornton's song expresses disappointment with a man often heralded for his sexual prowess with women. The song rejects heteronormativity by showing that men rarely satisfy her.

Thornton's most popular record, "Hound Dog," certainly emphasizes her disdain for a male lover. Leiber and Stoller wrote the lyrics after meeting Thornton. "We saw Big Mama and she knocked me cold," Leiber recalled. "She looked like the biggest, baddest, saltiest chick you would ever see. And she was *mean,* a 'lady bear,' as they used to call 'em. She must have been 350 pounds, and she had all these scars all over her face. I had to write a song for her that basically said, 'Go fuck yourself.'"[73] Like Jody, the man at the center of "Hound Dog" floats between several women and expects them to provide food and money. Ultimately, Thornton tells him to hit the road:

> You ain't nothin' but a hound dog
> Been snoopin' 'round my door
> You can wag your tail
> But I ain't gonna feed you no more

Figure 4.
Thornton in Los Angeles, 1978. Photograph by Charles Sawyer

The lyrics Thornton bellowed in her sonorous voice were devoid of romantic love. Her songs rarely, if ever, expressed desire for men or marriage. In that way, her music did not portray a woman content in her relationships with men.[74]

The rebellious spirit that Big Mama and Little Richard helped bring to fifties music attracted attention from their young fans, but both singers struggled to compete with white musicians who covered their tunes. The popularity of her most successful song, "Hound Dog," was eclipsed when Presley recorded a cover that became a hit with white audiences. In the end, Thornton estimates that she earned less than five hundred dollars for her version of the song. These financial woes also prompted a struggle between Thornton and Peacock owner Don Robey, who had a history of conflict. By the mid-fifties, Robey had gained a reputation as a corrupt businessman with a volatile temper. He allegedly beat Little Richard during a dispute in his office. "He jumped on me, knocked me down, and kicked me in the stomach. It gave me a hernia that was painful for years. I had to have an operation."[75] But Robey had a difficult time controlling Thornton with his fists. Little Richard commented that Robey "would beat everybody up but Big Mama Thornton. He was scared of her. She was built like a bull."[76] Robey decided not to renew her contract in 1956, prompting

her to leave Houston and relocate to the California Bay Area. She continued to record, but never attained the success of "Hound Dog." Thornton found some work during the blues revival of the 1960s, performing at festivals and college campuses, and touring in Europe.[77]

While she cited a dispute with Robey over wages as the reason for her departure, the split may have also been related to a shift in Peacock's priorities. The label began to move away from sexually subversive music by the late fifties. For a time in the early 1960s, Peacock focused on gospel releases. Little Richard made a temporary shift in genre. He abruptly abandoned his popular music career in 1957, got married, and began recording gospel music. He eventually returned to rock 'n' roll in 1962.

The 1950s careers of Big Mama and Little Richard illustrate how the racialized sexual politics of the Cold War and civil rights movement affected popular culture. By the early 1950s, the candid, outspoken discussions of queerness had disappeared from mass-distributed black music. The restrictive nature of antiqueer backlash affected the ways that artists could express gender and sexuality. But Big Mama and Little Richard also show the possibilities for self-expression in those years. Their rebellion against respectability and heteronormativity in the 1950s set the stage for the gender subversions that became a standard part of rock 'n' roll. In later years, Big Mama and Little Richard faced less scrutiny for their gender nonconformity. When performing in the seventies and early eighties, Thornton typically wore suits with cowboy boots and a hat, a practice she continued until her death in 1984 at the age of 57. In her last performances, Big Mama dressed as she pleased onstage and offstage.

By the 1980s Little Richard spoke openly about the gender and sexual transgressions of his youth, and he also took credit for helping make gender nonconformity part of rock 'n' roll. He acknowledged his influence in a 1984 interview: "Michael, David Bowie, Boy George, they've got my spot now."[78] Jimi Hendrix joined Little Richard's touring band in 1964, and the Seattle-born guitarist counted the Georgia showman as an enduring influence. Little Richard noted that Hendrix played B. B. King–style blues when they first met, but the guitarist "started rocking" and changed his personal appearance after joining the band, donning head wraps in the style of his idol: "He began to dress like me and he even grew a little mustache like mine."[79] Little Richard and Big Mama Thornton demonstrate that the gender nonconformity found in rock 'n' roll since its inception has been influenced by black queer performance.

Notes

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1. "Big Mama Talks with Chris Strachwitz," *Big Mama in Europe*, Arhoolie (2005); Michael Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton: The Life and Music* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2014), 26. Peacock owner Don Robey also controlled Duke Records, so the label is also known as Duke-Peacock Records. See Alan Govenar, *The Early Years of Rhythm and Blues: Focus on Houston* (Houston: Rice University Press, 1990).
2. On Thornton's influence and legacy, see Jack Halberstam, "Queer Voices and Musical Genders," in *Oh Boy! Masculinities in Popular Music*, ed. Freya Jarman-Ivens (New York: Routledge, 2007), 183–95; Maureen Mahon, "Listening for Willie Mae 'Big Mama' Thornton's Voice: The Sound of Race and Gender Transgressions in Rock and Roll," *Women and Music: A Journal of Gender and Culture* 15 (2011): 1–17.
3. Quoted in Richard Harrington, "A Wopbopaloobop," *Washington Post*, November 12, 1984.
4. This study is indebted to works that have examined queerness in the South, such as John Howard, ed., *Carryin' On in the Lesbian and Gay South* (New York: New York University Press, 1997); Howard, *Men Like That: A Southern Queer History* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999); E. Patrick Johnson, *Sweet Tea: Black Gay Men of the South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2008).
5. On race and rhythm and blues and rock 'n' roll, see Peter Guralnick, *Sweet Soul Music: Rhythm and Blues and the Southern Dream of Freedom* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1999); Charles Hughes, *Country Soul: Making Music and Making Race in the American South* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2015); Robert Palmer, *Rock & Roll: An Unruly History* (New York: Harmony Books, 1995); Craig Werner, *A Change Is Gonna Come: Music, Race, and the Soul of America* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 2006). As Halberstam notes, while the racial component of Elvis's remake of "Hound Dog" has been considered, "only rarely is this process described in terms of the 'straight' absorption of 'queer cultural influence'" ("Queer Voices and Musical Genders," 185).
6. Roderick A. Ferguson, *Aberrations in Black: Toward a Queer of Color Critique* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2004), 1, 149.
7. On gender and performance, see Judith Butler, *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity* (New York: Routledge, 1990). Jack Halberstam, *Female Masculinity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).
8. Nyan Shah, *Contagious Divides: Epidemics and Race in San Francisco's Chinatown* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2001), 13–14. See also Susan Lee Johnson's discussion of the homosocial male relationships that developed during the California Gold Rush in *Roaring Camp: The Social World of the California Gold Rush* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2000).
9. George Chauncey, *Gay New York: Gender, Urban Culture, and the Making of the Gay Male World* (New York: Basic Books, 1994), 22.
10. On gender, family, and politics during World War II, see Robert Westbrook, "'I Want a Girl, Just Like the Girl That Married Harry James': American Women and the Problem of Political Obligation in World War II," *American Quarterly* 42.4 (1990): 587–614.
11. Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton*, 7.
12. "Big Mama Talks with Chris Strachwitz."
13. Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton*, 6–10.
14. Chris Albertson, *Bessie* (1971; repr. New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2005); Angela Y. Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism: Gertrude "Ma" Rainey, Bessie Smith, and Billie Holiday* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1998). On blues women and sexuality, see Hazel Carby, "It Just Be's Dat Way Sometime: The Sexual Politics of Women's Blues," *Radical America* 20.4 (1986): 9–22.

15. Ma Rainey, "Prove It On Me Blues," *Complete Recorded Works: 1928 Sessions*, Document Records (1994); Davis, *Blues Legacies*, 238.
16. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 48.
17. Ma Rainey, "Sissy Blues," *Complete Recorded Works*, vol. 3 (1925–1926), Document Records (1998). Lyrics in Lawrence Levine, *Black Culture and Black Consciousness: Afro-American Folk Thought from Slavery to Freedom* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1977), 281; Davis, *Blues Legacies and Black Feminism*, 242.
18. Thaddeus Russell, "Color of Discipline: Civil Rights and Black Sexuality," *American Quarterly* 60.1 (2008): 104–5.
19. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 255.
20. Charles White, *The Life and Times of Little Richard: The Authorized Biography* (1984; repr. London: Omnibus, 2003), 9.
21. As E. Patrick Johnson notes, southerners tended to tolerate queerness as long as it did not trouble established norms (*Sweet Tea*, 2–3).
22. White, *Life and Times of Little Richard*, 23–24.
23. Ibid., 36.
24. Howard, *Men Like That*, 101.
25. On Decatur Street, see Tera Hunter, *To 'Joy My Freedom: Black Women's Lives and Labors after the Civil War* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1997).
26. Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton*, 10.
27. White, *Life and Times of Little Richard*, 55.
28. Howard Beeth and Cary D. Wintz, eds., *Black Dixie: Afro-Texan History and Culture in Houston* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press), 89.
29. Tyina Steptoe, *Houston Bound: Culture and Color in a Jim Crow City* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2016). See also Bernadette Pruitt, *The Other Great Migration: The Movement of Rural African Americans to Houston, 1900–1941* (College Station: Texas A&M University Press, 2013).
30. Amos Milburn, *The Best of Amos Milburn: Down the Road Apiece*, EMI Records (1993).
31. "Big Mama Talks with Chris Strachwitz."
32. Ibid.
33. Bill Carpenter, "Big Mama Thornton: Two Hundred Pounds of Boogaloo," *Living Blues*, November–December 1992, 27; Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton*, 12–13.
34. Halberstam, "Queer Voices and Musical Genders," 187.
35. Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton*, 11.
36. Big Mama Thornton featuring the Johnny Otis Band, "They Call Me Big Mama," *They Called Me Big Mama*, Proper Records (2005).
37. Carpenter, "Two Hundred Pounds of Boogaloo," 28.
38. Fifteenth Census of the United States, 1930, Houston, Harris County, Texas, p. 14, ancestry.com.
39. See the film *Little Axe* (dir. Rhys Ernst; 2016); and Ann Powers, *Good Booty: Love and Sex, Black and White, Body and Soul in American Music* (New York: Dey Street, 2017), 100.
40. White, *Life and Times of Little Richard*, 36.
41. Grady Gaines with Rod Evans, *I've Been Out There: On the Road with the Legends of Rock 'n' Roll* (College Station: Texas A&M Press, 2015), 2.
42. Chauncey, *Gay New York*, 48.
43. Amanda H. Littauer, "'Someone to Love': Teen Girls and Same-Sex Desire in the 1950s United States," in *Queer 1950s: Rethinking Sexuality in the Postwar Years*, ed. Heike Bauer and Matt Cook (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012). See also Elizabeth Lapovsky Kennedy and Madeline D. Davis, *Boots of Leather, Slippers of Gold: The History of a Lesbian Community* (New York: Routledge, 1993).
44. Carpenter, "Two Hundred Pounds of Boogaloo," 29.
45. David K. Johnson, *The Lavender Scare: The Cold War Persecution of Gays and Lesbians in the Federal Government* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).
46. Andrea Friedman, "The Smearing of Joe McCarthy: The Lavender Scare, Gossip, and Cold War Politics," *American Quarterly* 57.4 (2005): 1106.
47. Stephanie Westcott, "Producing Panic: Media, Morality, and American Sexuality, 1945–1970" (PhD diss., University of Wisconsin–Madison, 2012).

48. E. Franklin Frazier, "Negro, Sex Life of the African and American," in *The Encyclopedia of Sexual Behavior*, ed. Albert Ellis and Albert Abarbanel (New York: Hawthorne Books, 1961), 775; Russell, "Color of Discipline," 119.
49. Kevin J. Mumford, "Untangling Pathology: The Moynihan Report and Homosexual Damage, 1965–1975," *Journal of Policy History* 24.1 (2012): 59.
50. George Chauncey, "The Postwar Sex Crime Panic," in *True Stories from the American Past*, ed. William Graebner (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1993).
51. *Jet*, January 28, 1954; Kevin Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White: Black Gay Men from the March on Washington to the AIDS Crisis* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 2016), 41–49.
52. Lisa Duggan, *Sapphic Slashers: Sex, Violence, and American Modernity* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2001).
53. Wilson, *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies*, 172.
54. Gladys Bentley, "I Am a Woman Again," *Ebony*, August 1952, 93; Wilson, *Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies*, 163; Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White*, 48.
55. Bentley, "I Am a Woman Again," 94–96. The website Queer Music Heritage has articles on Bentley and others: see queermusicheritage.com/bentley3.html (accessed March 2, 2015).
56. Littauer, "'Someone to Love,'" 61.
57. Alfred Duckett, "The Third Sex, Parts 1–5," *Chicago Defender*, February 9, February 16, February 23, March 2, and March 9, 1957.
58. Littauer, "'Someone to Love,'" 61.
59. On connections between the civil rights movement and the Cold War, see Mary L. Dudziak, *Cold War Civil Rights: Race and the Image of American Democracy* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2000); and Timothy B. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie: Robert F. Williams and the Roots of Black Power* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1999).
60. Katharina M. Fackler, "Ambivalent Frames: Rosa Parks and the Visual Grammar of Respectability," *Souls* 18.2–4 (2016): 272; Danielle McGuire, *At the Dark End of the Street: Black Women, Rape, and Resistance: A New History of the Civil Rights Movement from Rosa Parks to the Rise of Black Power* (New York: Vintage Books, 2011).
61. John D'Emilio, *Lost Prophet: The Life and Times of Bayard Rustin* (New York: Free Press, 2003), 195; Mumford, *Not Straight, Not White*, 30–32; Russell, "Color of Discipline," 116.
62. Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton*, 15.
63. White, *Life and Times of Little Richard,* 49–50.
64. As Ferguson notes, "Miscegenation has often been interpreted separately from other transgressive sexual formations obtained in the context of racial exclusion" (*Aberrations in Black*, viii).
65. Tyson, *Radio Free Dixie*, 90–136; Timothy B. Tyson, *The Blood of Emmett Till* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2017).
66. Gaines, *I've Been Out There*, 38–39.
67. Ibid., 6.
68. White, *Life and Times of Little Richard*, 67–68.
69. Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton*, 15.
70. Jack Jones, "Blues' Big Mama Thornton Dies," *Los Angeles Times*, July 28, 1984; Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton*, 24.
71. Michael Hanchard, "Jody," *Critical Inquiry* 24 (Winter 1998): 473–97; Tyina Steptoe, "Jody's Got Your Girl and Gone: Gender, Folklore, and the Black Working Class," *Journal of African American History* 99.3 (2014): 251–74.
72. Willie Mae Thornton, "No Jody for Me," Peacock Records (1951).
73. *Rolling Stone*, April 19, 1990 (repr. August 22, 2011); Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton*, 24.
74. This links Thornton to her Jazz Age predecessors. Describing songs by blues women of the twenties and thirties, James Wilson writes, "There are no 'good men' in the songs, only exploiters, abusers, and cheaters" (*Bulldaggers, Pansies, and Chocolate Babies*, 171).
75. White, *Life and Times of Little Richard*, 37.
76. Carpenter, "Two Hundred Pounds of Boogaloo," 29; Spörke, *Big Mama Thornton*, 15.
77. "Big Mama Talks with Chris Strachwitz."
78. Harrington, "A Wopbopaloobop."
79. Phil Alexander, "When Jimi Hendrix Met Little Richard," *Mojo*, December 31, 2013; White, *Life and Times of Little Richard*, 126.