

# No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies

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***No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*. Johnson, E. Patrick, editor. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, October 2016. 440 pp. \$28.95 Paperback. Ebook available.**

*No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies* is E. Patrick Johnson's long-awaited second collection of essays on black queer studies. His first, *Black Queer Studies: A Critical Anthology* (2005), co-edited with Mae Gwendolyn Henderson, was groundbreaking in revealing black queer studies as a vibrant and developing field. *No Tea, No Shade*, the follow-up text, does not disappoint. This diverse anthology contains nineteen essays that reflect how the field of black queer studies has expanded and evolved since the release of *Black Queer Studies*.

The first indication that this volume differs from *Black Queer Studies* is the cover, which harkens back to that text through the use of black and white images and the black body. While *Black Queer Studies* has one figure, *No Tea, No Shade* incorporates two, both with their eyes closed. One figure stands mostly obscured by the other, the face turned three quarters view to the camera. The figure in the foreground is almost in profile, the body challenging conventional conceptions of masculinity through the visible scars from chest masculinization surgery, while paired with the model's hand holding an elegant tea cup, complete with raised pinky. And while the title *Black Queer Studies* is direct and almost too safe, *No Tea, No Shade* is more daring, similar to its contents. The title itself references drag culture by using the popular phrase, "No

tea, No shade,” meaning “I mean no disrespect, but...” with T being the truth. This volume refuses to fall into the confines of conventional text.

As in its predecessor, *No Tea, No Shade* contains several essays that evoke the names of two of the “parents” of black queer studies, Audre Lorde and James Baldwin. And while this anthology includes some predictable essays, such as La Marr Jurelle Bruce’s “The Body Beautiful,” which analyzes trans\* characters in film and Jamilla Musser’s tribute to Audre Lorde in “Re-membering Audre,” this collection expands the discussion of black queer studies beyond the familiar topics of literature and film as evidenced in other essays, such as “Reggaetón’s Crossings: Black Aesthetics, Latina Nightlife, and Queer Choreography” (Ramón H. Rivera-Servara’s) and “Toward a Hemispheric Analysis of Black Lesbian Feminist Activism and Hip Hop Feminism: Artist Perspectives from Cuba and Brazil” (Tanya L. Saunders). Both Rivera-Servara’s and Saunders’s essays provide a refreshing perspective in their consideration of the intersection of music, gender, and performance in black queer communities.

I initially struggled with the inclusion in this collection of Ramón H. Rivera-Servara’s “Reggaetón’s Crossings: Black Aesthetics, Latina Nightlife, and Queer Choreography” as a large portion of the essay focuses on the heterosexual gender roles at play in the perreo, the most well-known social dance in reggaetón, “a hybrid hip hop musical subgenre grounded in Jamaican dance hall” (Rivera-Servara 95). However, I found myself repeatedly returning to the piece when considering how this anthology differs from its predecessor. Throughout the essay, Rivera-Servara challenges the role of women as submissive in perreo. The dance has been heavily criticized for its sexual nature and how it places women in the passive role with men as the movements simulate doggy-style sex. However, Rivera-Servara demonstrates that the positioning and performance in perreo is much more complex. By citing several videos that document the dance style through competition, the author explains that the woman controls the dance. As she moves her body and tops her man, he must attempt to keep up with her rhythm and movements demonstrating that she possesses the power between the two (Rivera-Servara 101). Rivera-Servara continues by identifying reggaetón’s popularity in Latino/o queer clubs, and how the participants in the dance queer the traditional gender roles marked in heterosexual clubs. Rivera-Servara continues by identifying reggaetón’s popularity in Latino/o queer clubs, and how the participants in the dance queer the traditional gender roles marked in heterosexual clubs. The author references a femme lesbian couple, Dulce and Andrea, and their performance of perreo as the two position themselves in the traditional male and female roles (respectively) of the dance. Rivera-Servara writes, “[t]hey enter the space of the club with their own desires for an erotic agency not afraid of playing with gender but also secured in its queer differences from the mainstream cultural text” (107). While acknowledging the gendered and homophobic violence that exists in reggaetón, Rivera-Servara also emphasizes how feminist and queer performances challenge the heteronormative tradition by displacing the role of masculine dominance.

Continuing on the cultural expansion in the text, Tanya L. Saunders's "Toward a Hemispheric Analysis of Black Lesbian Feminist Activism and Hip Hop Feminism: Artist Perspectives from Cuba and Brazil" examines black lesbian activists in hip hop culture in Cuba and Brazil. Throughout her essay, Saunders explains how queer black-identified, Afro-descendant women use hip hop as a voice for black feminism and disrupt the notion of the silencing of women and queer artists in the hip hop community. The author focuses on the Cuban lesbian hip hop group Las Krudas CUBENSI (later renamed Krudas CUBENSI) and the Brazilian artists Tiely Queen and Lú AfroBreak, who all embrace their lesbian identities, blackness, and African cultural heritage. Through her friendships with the artists and later her research, Saunders learned that the women found that they could use hip hop to voice their opinions and ideas about racism, racially and sexually inclusive society, and capitalism. The artists also found that they could bring their sexual identities into conversation through hip hop, challenging cultural norms that were much more critical of lesbians than bisexual people and gay men, specifically in Cuba. In doing so, they were able to break critical social barriers among listeners. Saunders's brings the history of transnational black lesbian hip hop artists and the evolution of the hip hop genre into conversation, emphasizing the lack of research that exists on this movement. While the artists have worked to become visible within their culture through their use of hip hop, the lack of documentation and analysis continues to threaten their erasure.

In addition to cultural diversity, *No Tea, No Shade* has several essays that demonstrate how the black queer online presence has expanded through websites, social media, and dating applications (apps). When *Black Queer Studies* was published in 2005, social media was in its infancy. MySpace and Facebook were both becoming popular, the use of a smart phone was rare (at least in the U.S.), and the dating app was non-existent. However at this point, people have been active in the queer online spaces of websites, chatrooms, and listservs for more than fifteen years. *No Tea, No Shade's* essays "Black Data" (Shaka McGlotten), "Boystown: Gay Neighborhoods, Social Media, and The (Re)production of Racism" (Zachary Blair), and "Black Gay (Raw) Sex" (Marlon M. Bailey) each present the changes that the internet has played in black queer culture, including data collection of black and black queer internet users' online activities and black queer interactions using social media and dating apps. All three essays indicate not only how the online presence brings the black queer community together, but also how racism is produced to continue to marginalize those within that community.

Another aspect of the text that expands its content's diversity is its inclusion of Marlon M. Bailey's "Black Gay (Raw) Sex," which disrupts the respectability that *Black Queer Studies* seemed to embrace by reflecting queer desire within the queer black community. In addition to its attention to racism in online dating websites and phone apps as previously mentioned, Bailey focuses on raw sex between black men, which he differentiates from barebacking, which he defines as "a decisive and deliberate practice that is sometimes associated with indifference toward or outright

resistance to regimes of normative sexual regulation” (244). The author notes that the difference between the use of barebacking versus raw are reflective of race and class (where barebacking is used by white gay men and raw is used by black gay men). Bailey challenges his reader with this essay’s topic, which is one reason why it is so refreshing in this collection (in the book’s introduction, E. Patrick Johnson admits to “clutching his pearls” several times while reading the piece). The author asserts that he is a resolute advocate for HIV prevention but also likes raw sex. Bailey goes on to explain that this contradiction is much more complicated, and it is. One of the significant aspects of this essay is the attention that the author brings to the lack of research conducted on sex between black gay men. “[T]here has been no cogent theorization of high-risk sexual behavior in black gay communities; instead, there has mostly been epidemiological surveillance of it” (240). Bailey continues by explaining that sex between black men is more complicated than what is reflected in dialogues about HIV in that the conversation only focuses on the high-risk behavior and not the cultural and social differences that lead to it. The author acknowledges that black gay men are having raw sex, but explains that society needs to look further into why men are having it, and those reasons often go beyond sexual pleasure, but are instead embedded in social stigmas of race and class.

The area of black queer studies is still very young, and there is still much to write about as evidenced by several of the authors in this collection. *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies* is a significant contribution to black queer studies. Each of the nineteen essays has value, and yes, some stand out more than others. Through his selection of essays, E. Patrick Johnson demonstrates how the field has advanced since the first volume, but also signals that black queer studies will continue to develop. I look forward to a third volume sometime in the future that reflects the continued evolution of this valuable field of study. Hopefully I won’t have to wait ten years for its publication.

### Works Cited

- Bailey, Marlon M. “Black Gay (Raw) Sex.” *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*. Edited by E. Patrick Johnson. Duke University Press, 2016.
- Rivera-Servara, Ramón H. “Reggaetón’s Crossings: Black Aesthetics, Latina Nightlife, and Queer Choreography.” *No Tea, No Shade: New Writings in Black Queer Studies*. Edited by E. Patrick Johnson. Duke University Press, 2016.