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This special issue of *Auto/Biography Studies*, a journal dedicated to scholarship on multiple aspects of life writing, illuminates the diversity and richness of African American life writing, as well as the theoretical innovations and creativity of scholars in the field. Guest edited by Eric D. Lamore, co-editor of a book on Phillis Wheatley and author of work on Olaudah Equiano, the volume contains 9 essays on texts ranging from slave narratives to digital narratives. Covering writings from the early nineteenth to the early twenty-first centuries, the volume presents new work on lesser known or neglected autobiographies, biographies, and memoirs, expanding the field as it does so. Students and scholars of African-American Studies will be intrigued by these analyses of autobiographical writing by Matthew Henson, who accompanied Robert Peary on his 1909 expedition to the North Pole, by Paul Robeson, whose *Here I Stand* (1958) is shaped by Cold War McCarthyism, and by Maja Angelou, whose culinary memoirs/cook-books, rather than her well known fictional autobiography, *I Know Why the Caged Bird Sings*, are brought under analysis. As Leigh Gilmore puts it in the opening of *Autobiographics*, autobiography “provokes fantasies of the real” (17), and indeed some of the studies exert this fascination in their accounts of the works they examine, though the real contribution of the essays in this volume is that they provide an inspiring range of theoretical innovations in the study of life writing and critical insights into how narratives of identity intersect with other discourses at different historical junctures.

In an essay that introduces the special issue, appropriately called “The Futures of African American Life Writing,” Eric D. Lamore takes the pulse of the field by self-consciously relating it to the 1986 special issue of *a/b* devoted to African American autobiography which, edited by William L. Andrews, contained groundbreaking and still widely cited essays. This early work focused on writing from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries and placed slave narratives in a position of centrality. Lamore views the current issue as forming a collective response to subsequent critiques of these early delimitations of the field, and indeed, in dialogue with earlier scholarship and theory, the volume as a whole expands the field in terms of subject matter, method, and theory. Lamore draws attention to transnational connections and interdisciplinary perspectives, as well as emerging forms and forums for life-writing and the continued importance of archival research. He concludes

by sketching his own consideration of *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano, or Gustavus Vassa, the African. Written by Himself* as an example of what John Bryant calls a “fluid text,” one that exists in different versions, and whose fluidity, Lamore suggests, corresponds to contemporary theories of the fluidity or multiplicity of selves in autobiography theory. Equiano’s *Narrative* exemplifies “autoadaptation,” a process of editorial revision involving the transformation into a new version of an autobiography.

Three nineteenth-century slave narratives by African Muslims Omar ibn Said, Mahommah Gardo Baququa, and Nicholas Said are examined by Patrick E. Horn, who combines close textual analysis with attention to the theoretical issues raised by these accounts. He questions the wisdom of categorizing these narratives by religious affiliation, drawing attention to the ambiguities surrounding the conversion experiences and the recording of the lives of these men. While the slippery character of language seems to allow critics to identify subversion in almost any text, Horn’s readings are truly compelling and, like the texts themselves, they “complicate master narratives of American origins and provoke meaningful questions about cultural roots, religious beliefs, and national identities” (47). Joycelyn Moody also examines writing about religious experience in the nineteenth century, focusing on violence, homosociality, the rejection of stereotype, and the domination of women in spiritual autobiographies of African-American Christian men. She argues that critical inquiry into the life writings of John Jea, William J. Brown, and selected conversion experiences recounted by Civil War veterans and recorded by Andrew P. Watson is relevant to questions posed today by feminists and progressive theologians about African American masculinities and gender relations. Masculinity and, even more prominently, the connections between race and national identity, are also taken up in the analyses of life writing by Henson, mentioned above, and by Paul Robeson, from the early- and mid-twentieth century.

New forms and themes for African American life writing in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century are taken up in articles addressing Buddhism and the body in autobiographies by black women writing in the 2000s, the life writing of blogger-cum-novelist-cum-screenwriter Angela Nissel, and identity and genre mixtures in life writing by transracial adoptees. Tracy Curtis examines Buddhist autobiographies by Faith Adiele, Jan Willis, and Angel Kyodo, whose engagement with Buddhism, growing out of the Civil Rights Movement, can be seen both as a continuation of African American women’s spiritual autobiography, and also as being at

odds with that tradition's emphasis on community. Linda Furgerson Selzer discusses issues such as the growth of the digital public sphere and the role of life writing in social status as it emerges in the career of Nissel (author of *The Broke Diaries* and *Mixed: My Life in Black and White*, as well as staff writer for the TV series *Scrubs*). Concluding this issue of *a/b*, Marina Fedosik examines the accounts of two African Americans adopted by white couples, Jaiya John's *Black Baby White Hands* (2005) and Catherine E. McKinley's *The Book of Sarahs* (2002). Placing their work in the context of U.S. debates concerning racial matching in adoption practices, Fedosik demonstrates how the stories of these transracial adoptees draw on both search adoption narratives and black autobiography to chronicle the complexities of racial identity and identification in the U.S. and even beyond. Like other such texts, they emphasize "the transracial adoptee's alienation from the adoptive family and culture due to racialization, inability to identify unconditionally with her or his birth family and/or culture due to lack of exposure to birth culture and language, and estrangement from histories of ethnic communities in America combined with cultural pressure to identify in relation to such communities" (215).

Both texts begin, in the tradition of the adoption search narrative, with a growing sense of difference from the adoptive family that impels a search for wholeness, but John's narrative is "overridden" by a conversion narrative involving the creation of a black, male identity. Fedosik argues that McKinley's autobiography also recounts her embrace of an African American identity, but due to her biracial heritage (a white, Jewish birth mother and African American father) and to expectations about how race should be performed in the U.S. and later in Ghana, she must continually revise the self she seeks to create. Her narrative, even more than John's, emphasizes the instability and performative character of racial identity, but also the ideological and cultural constraints on individual performances: "For the transracial adoptee, whose embodied difference is constantly invoked and contextualized by the histories of racial relations in the U.S., performances of certain kinds of whiteness or blackness often become impossible" (226). This article also contributes to the growing field of culture and adoption studies, just as most of the scholarship presented in this special issue shows the importance of life writing to our understandings of a variety of historical periods, social discourses, literary conventions, and narratives of diverse identities.