Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book

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For so many of us, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" was the first time we even thought about some of the things that you cited. When I wrote that essay, which is really about what we call neoslave narratives now, trying to think about the history that these women writers were responding to, the frame that I was beginning to understand, that history was set up for me by "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." The publications of Hortense Spillers' Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book and Toni Morrison's Beloved marks 1987 as an important year.

Indeed, I am haunted by the continued relevance of Spillers' 1987 essay "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe: An American Grammar Book" in my life and in the lives of Black men and women (transgender and cisgendered) whom I know. As our lives unfold, the Grammar becomes clearer, but the logic of that Grammar is always exceeded. The Grammar is antiblack violence—and specifically our availability to any kind of violence from anyone. It is what gives coherence to American life. It is the violence of the state, like the official execution of Troy Davis and the summary execution of Rekia Boyd, whom it kills. For so many of us, "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe" was the first time we even thought about some of the
things that you cited. When I wrote that essay, which is really about what we call neoslave narratives now, trying to think about the history that these women writers were responding to, the frame that I was beginning to understand, that history was set up for me by "Mama's Baby, Papa's Maybe." I was writing a review essay for Signs on black feminism in the academy, and as I began to talk about Hortense Spillers, I realized that the work of so many people ... Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the Nineteenth Century By Susan Coultrap-McQuin University of North Carolina Press, 1990. Read preview Overview. GRAMMAR BOOK. HORTENSE I. SPILLERS. Let's face it. Though among the most readily available "whipping boys" of fairly recent public discourse concerning African-Americans and national policy, "The Moynihan Report" is by no means unprecedented in its conclusions; it belongs, rather, to a class of symbolic paradigms that 1) inscribe "ethnicity" as a scene of negation and 2) confirm the human body as a metonymic figure for an entire repertoire of.