Indefinite hyperbolic numerals like *zillion*, *jillion*, and *umpteen* have the form of numerals, and behave like numerals, but indicate a non-specific exaggerated large quantity. They are cross-linguistically rare, emerging in contexts where there is a cultural concern with quantification. A historical sociolinguistic approach is used to analyze the rapid expansion and variation in indefinite hyperbolic numerals in American English between 1880 and the present. No mere playful or childlike phonological alterations, they are geographically and socially delimited means of expressing indefinite quantities in informal contexts. *Umpteen* originated in late nineteenth century America, not as World War I soldiers’ cant as frequently claimed. *Zillion* blossomed in African American English in the 1920s, while *jillion* originated in Texas around the same time. Until the late 1930s, when Damon Runyon began to use them interchangeably, *zillion* and *jillion* were used in radically different, non-overlapping social contexts. Since the 1970s, the lexicon has expanded, using the emphatic prefixes *ka-, ba-, and ga-*. Interviews conducted with African-American youth in 2009-11 suggest that *zillion* may now have a fixed numeral meaning for some speakers, completing the circle from definite to indefinite back to definite reference.

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*A Zillion Dollars and a Jillion Junebugs: Umpteen Reflections on Indefinite Hyperbolic Numerals*

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